



The Writer's Art: Tao Yuanqing and the Formation of Modern Chinese Design (1900-1930)

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The Writer's Art: Tao Yuanqing and the Formation of Modern Chinese Design (1900-1930)

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of History of Art and Architecture

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The dissertation examines the history of modern design in early 20th-century China. The emergent field of design looked to replace the specific cultural and historical references of visual art with an international language of geometry and abstraction. However, design practices also, encouraged extracting culturally unique visual forms by looking inward at a nation's constructed past. The challenge of uniting these dual, and seemingly contradictory, goals was met in a collaborative book cover design project between Lu Xun (1881-1936), China's most influential modern writer, and Tao Yuanqing (1893-1929), a painter who transformed ancient motifs into a transnational vocabulary of modern design.

As the title suggests, the dissertation provides a history of modern Chinese design in four chapters, with the Lu Xun-Tao Yuanqing collaboration at its core. The investigation begins with the moment of culmination, wherein Lu Xun and Tao Yuanqing's intersubjective dynamic allowed for evocative yet inscrutable book cover designs to be created. In the new medium of design, the writer's anxiety regarding the inadequacy of language converged with the artist's desire for ambiguity in art. The critical analysis then moves back to earlier instances of design and examines how the history of design in China was inflected by the World Exposition, Japan, art education, and commercial art. The inquiry finally moves forward to the discussion of Tao Yuanqing's art and design's relationship with a range of discursive fields in aesthetics and

literary criticism, including modern notions of beauty, childlikeness, empathy, the native soil movement, cosmopolitanism, symbolism, and ambiguity in art. This part reveals how Tao Yuanqing's innovations ironically endorsed while simultaneously subverting contemporary interpretive efforts.

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Note on Chinese and Japanese Terms

All Chinese names appear in *pinyin* followed by the corresponding traditional Chinese characters. Certain names also appear in the *wade-giles* Romanization system if quoted from primary sources. Chinese and Japanese names are given in full throughout the text rather than just the last name. The last name precedes the given name in all Chinese and Japanese names, with the exception of contemporary scholars. Chinese and Japanese terms are italicized and the corresponding Chinese characters are provided when necessary. English translations of the titles of the primary sources are provided throughout the footnotes, and the original Chinese and Japanese are provided in the bibliography. If the Chinese and Japanese sources come with their own translation, that translation will be used. All English translations from Chinese, Japanese, French, and German are author's translation unless otherwise cited.

Introduction

In March 1925, the renowned writer and cultural figure Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) organized an independent painting exhibition for the little-known artist Tao Yuanqing 陶元慶 (1893-1929) in Beijing. Prior to the exhibition, an event considered a luxury for even established artists at the time, Lu Xun had already adopted one design by Tao Yuanqing as a book cover. The author, who championed the use of vernacular Chinese in the written language, had by this time achieved fame as the founding father of modern Chinese literature. For all his fame and eloquence with the written word though, in the 1925 exhibition, his first effort to promote a contemporary artist, the writer found himself unable to put into words what it was that drew him to Tao Yuanqing's paintings. Failed by words, Lu Xun decided to make the artist's work physically a part of his literary production. At the exhibition, he was so struck by the painting *Big Red Robe* that, shortly after the show, he conscripted a young writer friend to quickly assemble a collection of short stories so that the painting could be printed as its cover (figure 1). For the first time in modern Chinese history, a book was written for the preservation of an image.

Tao Yuanqing had studied oil-painting at the Shanghai Fine Arts School and worked as a graphic artist for the prominent Shanghai-based newspaper *Eastern Times* (*Shibao* 時報). Prior to the encounter with Lu Xun, he compiled *Chinese Ancient Designs* (*Zhongguo tu'an ji* 中國圖案集), arguably the first design compendium in modern China. In the book, he abstracted and deconstructed complex traditional design motifs in order to re-configure the modular units with which new designs could be made. In his cover designs, he would add, to these new ornamental units, cross-cultural motifs and conventional painterly subject matters acquired

through training in the European *beaux-arts* tradition. The design premise gave him license to eliminate the cultural and historical specificities of the motifs employed. As a result, Tao Yuanqing created a culturally-neutral graphic art, never before seen in Chinese art. Thanks to Lu Xun's promotion, Tao Yuanqing became one of the most celebrated artists in the 1920s.

Tao Yuanqing presents a unique case in modern Chinese art history because, unlike other artists of comparable fame, none of his original paintings survived the subsequent political vicissitude in China. Lu Xun's prescience not only ensured the survival of his paintings in the printed form, but also determined the choice of medium employed by the artist—in this case, the medium of the book dominated Tao Yuanqing's artistic output. Rather than lamenting the loss of the paintings, I choose to celebrate the surviving images and the new significance of the print medium they highlight.¹ In the context of the early 20th century in China, there emerged two paradoxical tendencies amidst the influx of transcultural influences. Specific cultural and historical references in the visual arts were replaced by an international language of geometry and abstraction. The arts, especially painting, were also, contrastingly, charged with an explicit cultural mission to reinvigorate Chinese traditions and resist uncritical adoption of European styles. The challenge of uniting these dual, seemingly contradictory goals was met in the medium of book design initiated by Lu Xun and Tao Yuanqing.

This dissertation argues that the visual appeal of Tao Yuanqing's work lies in his ability to empty out symbolism and cultural references from the most encoded imageries in China. He transformed readymade industrial decorative patterns into evocative images, productive and

¹ Here I echo Marshall McLuhan's insistence in thinking that the medium *is* the message. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

constitutive of thoughts unbounded by discursive debates. Beyond the decorative veneer, these uncanny designs were conducive to visualizing the spirit of paradox, and of critique, both defining characters of the period that literature alone could not articulate. The sense of discovery and games of vision elicited by the abstract and ambiguous designs sustain visual scrutiny and grant his art an enduring appeal.

Tao Yuanqing's first cover design for Lu Xun in 1924 set the tone for a persistent ineffability characteristic of his art (figure 2). The alluring cover garnered him a national reputation since the underlying book *Symbols of Depression* (*Kumon no shōchō* 苦悶の象徴) became a bestseller and enjoyed twelve reprints within a decade.² Originally written by Kuriyagawa Hakuson 厨川白村 (1880-1923), the literary criticism served as China's introduction to the Freudian-Jungian idea of psychoanalysis. Adding to the significance of its content, Tao Yuanqing's unique design further set the book apart from contemporaneous publications, and remains visually exceptional today. In the design, an abstract nude female figure emerges from a serrated circle. It is difficult to make out her pose as parts of the figuration dissolve into wriggly lines. The figure was surrounded by amorphous red shapes reminiscent of fragments or hybrids of birds and fish. A trident penetrates the rolling circle, its prongs poking at the figure's face. Upon initial viewing, the design evades any available interpretive framework. Though

² The book was first printed in December 1924 by The Renaissance Society (*Xinchao she*) affiliated with Peking University. The society later transformed into Beixin Book Company. It was reprinted twelve times until October 1935. Approximately 18,000 copies from the first and eighth edition were printed and sold. For more statistics, see Kudō Takamasa, *Chūgoku goken ni okeru Kuriyagawa Hakuson genshō: ryūsei, suitai, kaiki to keizoku* [The Kuriyagawa Hakuson Phenomenon in China: Peak, Decline, Return, and Legacy] (Kyoto: Shibunkaku shuppan, 2010).

difficult to parse, the design was in dialogue with contemporaneous artistic practices and discursive influences.

Firstly, consider Tao Yuanqing's chosen subject. The subject of the female nude had already become a staple motif in the institutional training of Western-style drawing and painting widely practiced by the 1920s. The process involves what Ernst Gombrich calls "making and matching," the method of comparing what one has drawn or painted with what he or she is trying to draw or paint, and gradually correcting the work to look more like what appears in front of the eye. Figure drawing and sketching from nature with this method were essentially new to China because Chinese art had never been observational prior to this time. A statement photograph from around 1930 showcases progressive artists, men and women, surrounding the female nude, thereby representing the liberation of Chinese art from convention (figure 3). Chinese painting had, until this period, been heavily modular rather than observational. This dominant mode of painting was systematized by painting manuals that emerged in the 17th century. They served as schematic repositories of motifs and models for replication. Figures in Chinese painting were commonly adapted from prototypes found in these manuals. Tao Yuanqing's use of the nude female broke free from both the old and the new, defying the repetitive and observational modes of painting.

Next, the design engages with linearity. The modern and abstract quality in Tao Yuanqing's design belies the image's heavy reliance on linearity. Linearity is central to the pictorial tradition in East Asia. Elegant flowing lines had been admired for their ethereal and weightless quality since as early as the 4th century because lines were regarded as imbued with vital forces and, hence, participants in the flux of the world, reflecting the idea of containment

and embeddedness. Lines are so deeply seated in Chinese pictorial tradition that many modern Chinese artists reacted against tradition by explicitly overcoming the centrality of lines. As a result of this reactionary tendency, the technique of modeling in drawing and non-linear method in oil painting represented very attractive options for Chinese artists. Tao Yuanqing, rather than straightforwardly renouncing, actually maintains linearity. His lines are, nonetheless, much more free-floating, not strictly fulfilling the goal of figuration, subverting, but not rejecting past aesthetics.

Lastly, Tao Yuanqing and Lu Xun's first collaboration was in part a reaction against decorative "cover art" meant to accommodate popular taste in cosmopolitan Shanghai. In this age of print, many widely-circulated journals adopted beauty prints as their cover design. The cover of an issue of the literary weekly *Saturday* (*Libailiu*, 禮拜六), for instance, features a female in a modern domestic setting in the act of reading (figure 4). Reclining in the sofa, she seems absorbed in the reading, an act mirroring what is expected of the readers who will likely engross themselves in the underlying popular romantic novels. Other periodicals preferred using photographs. *The Young Companion* (*Liangyou huabao* 良友畫報), arguably the most visually stimulating pictorial ever published in China, often chose photographs of female beauty to decorate its cover (figure 5). Photographs, although rendering beauty more life-like, lacked the kind of sophistication and romanticization that the print medium had accumulated over time. They tended to leave little room for imagination.

Tao Yuanqing's ambiguous design for *Symbols of Depression*, on the other hand, at once comforting and vexing, leaves too much for the imagination. As one dwells on the picture, it becomes unclear whether the trident is held in place by a disembodied hand or the female

figure's own amputated foot, a confusion generated by the blank space between where the leg is cut off and the hand or foot begins. One can endlessly debate about what the sinuous lines and amorphous red shapes might represent. It does not matter what they really stand for; in fact, they are no more than bodies of mass and traces of marks embodying, perhaps, a latent energy that perpetuates the churning of the serrated loop. Many contemporary critics distinguished Tao Yuanqing's work from other modern artists for his ability to visualize latent motion.

In addition to purely painterly concern, the inarticulate and unaccountable shapes signifying the process of transformation were particularly pertinent to the ethos of the period. Early twentieth-century China was characterized by an intense process of Westernization and modernization. The increased cultural interaction with Europe and Japan also made it the most introspective moment in Chinese history. The Western powers' encroachment in China at this time unprecedentedly shook the Chinese self-confidence in their own culture. Chinese intellectuals were disenchanted by the nation's weakness, particularly reflected through the numerous unequal treaties China was forced into signing with European countries and Japan. The phrase "sick man of East Asia" refers to China under such conditions. The need for a strong, modern nation-state soon permeated to all spheres of cultural life. The notion of national weakness led the intellectuals to conceive of cultural productions in terms of a strong-weak dichotomy, and more specifically, the masculine versus the feminine.

The practice of calligraphy, for instance, was reconceptualized under this masculine-feminine dichotomy. What was considered the martial and masculine style of calligraphy was a style derived from ancient inscriptions carved into stone steles. The process of carving writing onto stone is conducive to producing the rough, rigid, and undercrafted look preferred by

modern calligraphers as having more raw energy, more internal vigor than the fluid and elegant strokes derived from Wang Xizhi's 王羲之 (303-361) writing and transmitted over the centuries via the medium of copy books, the so-called model calligraphy. Although the polarized calligraphic styles (stele school versus model-book, *beipai* versus *tiepai* in Chinese) had already emerged in the 17th century, it was not until the late 19th century that they were politicized for the national cause.³ The classic, sophisticated writing style was rejected in favor of the more masculine stone stele calligraphy, which remains the style preferred by calligraphers and artists in China today.

The preference for the rather unrefined stele style calligraphy manifests a strong desire of the period to reproduce the materiality of three dimensional objects onto two dimensional surfaces. The national cause witnessed an intensification of epigraphic studies in the late 19th and early 20th century with a focus on ancient ritual bronzes. New printing technologies were deployed to enhance the solid and robust appearance of these visually rich artefacts. The established literati pastime of antiquarianism, in Chinese the study of bronze and stone (*jinsi xue*), took on a new significance in the modern period. Its goal was to establish a Chinese cultural patrimony in the print medium, as a means to increase China's cultural self-awareness by collecting, classifying, and celebrating its glorious "industrial" past. The ritual bronzes, rich in inscription as historical records, became the most crucial artefacts to the making of modern Chinese cultural history.

³ On the formation of the stele style calligraphy, see Qianshen Bai, *Fu Shan's World: The Transformation of Chinese Calligraphy in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003).

Chinese ritual bronzes were also crucial to Tao Yuanqing's design practice. The compendium *Chinese Ancient Designs* (1925) essentially converts patterns found on ancient bronze vessels into an encyclopedia, creating a new vocabulary for design. These parent sources went through remarkable transformation in his later works of design, morphing into dynamic shapes and masses, capable of evoking a number of associations at a time. Tao Yuanqing's dematerializing approach represents a different model to reinvent ancient forms of art. It hinges upon a notion of transformation through dynamic metamorphoses rather than any one-directional consolidation project. The initial ineffable image such as the cover of *Symbols of Depression* begins to take on meaning once we situate Tao Yuanqing's work at the intersection of diverse artistic and cultural engagement.

In contemporary scholarship, despite the visual appeal of Tao Yuanqing's design, it has not been the subject of rigorous analysis. The reasons for such a dearth of scholarship on book design are many, but three reasons dominate. First, the study of early 20-century art has been heavily framed by an understanding of its subsequent history and its retrospective incorporation into the history of modernism. As a result, scholarly attention has been directed towards the Chinese modern woodcut movement in the 1930s. The woodcut medium, due to its expediency and manifesto style, is thought to hold more political and historical relevance than painting or design. Unlike painting and print, design cannot be envisioned as a movement supporting a readily lofty cause, defined by a group of members, manifestos, and institutions. In China, design has happened unsystematically. Terms were also quite messy as they often underwent several translations. The Chinese translation of design, *tu'an*, borrowing the

Japanese neologism *zuan*, was not stabilized until the late 1910s. The realization of works thus often straddled the fields of painting and design, and fluctuated between institutional and private patronage. Despite the lack of critical studies on book cover design, the potential of the field was already fully expressed in Luo Xiaohua's *Zhongguo jindai shuji zhuangzhen* published in 1990.⁴ The little gem reproduces over five hundred cover designs created over the course of the first half of the 20th-century. While providing detailed descriptions of the visual effect of cover designs, the book does not go beyond the purview of art appreciation.

The second reason for the lack of critical studies on design lies in the constraints posed by the East-West binary, a dichotomy motivated by the intellectuals' own formulation of the issue in the early Republican period (1911-1949). The painter Pan Tianshou 潘天壽 (1897-1971) claims in his *A History of Chinese Painting* (1926) that there are two types of culture: Western, born on the Italian peninsula; and Eastern, originating in China.⁵ Such a Sinocentric and essentialist view on art and culture dominated the Republican intellectual discourse, but one must heed Michael Sullivan's caution that it is one thing for Republican intellectuals to speak of the East-West dichotomy, but quite another when modern scholars formulate history in similar terms.⁶ Design has thus been discussed within studies of modern commercial art and urban culture. Lynn Pan's book *Shanghai Style – Art and Design between the Wars*, for instance, judiciously demonstrates that art and design of the period were attempting to bridge the divide

⁴ Luo Xiaohua, *Zhongguo jindai shuji zhuangzhen* [Modern Chinese Book Design] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1990).

⁵ Pan Tianshou (Pan Tien Shou), *Zhongguo huihua shi* [A History of Chinese Painting] (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1926), preface.

⁶ Michael Sullivan, *The Meeting of Eastern and Western Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), introduction.

between nationalism and internationalism.⁷ A more nuanced narrative is provided by Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen who see the graphic output as an elite form of high modernism in China.⁸ Following the effort of the scholars working on Chinese design history, I formulate the issue around design's internal tension between nationalistic revival and internationalization.

The fundamental reason was the lack of a productive and sensitive descriptive language. The failure of language to articulate the appeal of Tao Yuanqing's art, as noted by Lu Xun, represents a broader and persistent challenge to the study of art from this period. During the 1920s, many intellectuals realized that traditional art criticism relying on artists' biographies, brush dynamics, and symbolism failed to convey the new visual experience. While similar perceived crises of language occurred in the past, it was the first time that writers and aestheticians could no longer practice their criticism with implicit confidence. The East-West essentialist view caught on as traditional art criticisms were becoming obsolete. Current scholarship in the Chinese language tend to take the commentaries at face value and conclude with similar confirmation of the ineffable quality observed in Tao Yuanqing's work. One may ask, then, if nobody could articulate the period's fascination with Tao Yuanqing's art, and if the descriptive language was indeed inadequate for its merit, does that mean that his art transcended the culture and the period that produced it? Arguing against radical cultural determinism, Martin Jay advocates for universal qualities intrinsic to images that can never be

⁷ Lynn Pan, *Shanghai Style: Art and Design between the Wars* (San Francisco: Long River Press, 2008).

⁸ Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, *The Art of Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 89-91.

fully subsumed under cultural protocols.⁹ Tao Yuanqing's works fit this description, transcending a common level of cultural self-awareness in modern China. This dissertation, while not ignoring the historical discussion of national styles, challenges the descriptive impasse and approaches design in early 20th- century China with a focus on visualization and sensory formation.

Only recently has the study of design history emerged in mainland China. There are, as Wendy Wong points out, major methodological barriers to such study.¹⁰ Concerned with establishing historical continuation, survey-type studies on the entire history of Chinese arts and crafts from antiquity to the present dominate. Y.C.J. Kwok and S. Kok's 2007 book *The Birth of Modern Design in China* offers the first focused exploration of design in the modern period. While providing detailed categorical studies such as book design, advertisement, and household appliances, the research does not take into account the determinant relationship between design and other artistic practices. And this represents a rich, untapped vein, as the history of design is closely tied to the avant-garde movement in the early 20th-century. The lens of design can refresh our understanding of canonical works of art, and represents an effective approach with which to study newly discovered visual and textual material. The publishing of primary sources on design in the early 20th century suggests that design could be used as a powerful conceptualizing tool to explore key issues in modernism such as authorship,

⁹ Martin Jay, "Cultural Relativism and the Visual Turn." *Journal of Visual Culture*, 1:3 (2002): 267-278.

¹⁰ Wendy Wong, "Design History and Study in East Asia: Part 2 Greater China: People's Republic of China/Hong Kong/Taiwan." *Journal of Design History*, 24:4 (2011): 375-395.

universality, and social responsibility.¹¹ The convergence between the study of design history and material culture has also brought increasing scholarly attention to the medium of the book. Anna Sigrídur Arnar's recent study on Stéphane Mallarmé's investment in the book to create interactive reading experiences reveals the link between past struggles with new media and the present dilemma of the book's role in the digital age.¹² In the field of Chinese studies, such efforts have only appeared in the studies of early-modern art; for example, J.P. Park's book on the painting manuals in the Ming dynasty demonstrates how the book was utilized to enhance social capital.¹³

Tao Yuanqing and Lu Xun's book design project belongs to the global phenomenon of collaboration between writers and painters in the early 20th century. Familiar examples include El Lissitzky's design for Vladimir Mayakovsky's book of poetry *For the Voice* published in 1923. Aimed at destroying the traditional passive mode of reading, this interactive book transforms the syntax of poetry, graphic design, and the notion of the codex form itself. In Meiji Japan, the popular artist Hashiguchi Goyō (1880-1922) designed covers and illustrations for writers such as Natsume Sōseki's (1867-1916) and Mori Ōgai (1862-1922) since 1905. The partnerships in East Asia are more comparable to each other because they do not technically belong to the category of artists' books, unlike those of their Soviet counterpart. Johanna Drucker makes the distinction between *livres d'artiste*, which do not interrogate the conceptual or material form of the book,

¹¹ Helen Armstrong, ed., *Graphic Design Theory: Readings from the Field* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2009).

¹² Annar Sigrídur Arnar, *The Book as Instrument: Stéphane Mallarmé, the Artist's Book, and the Transformation of Print Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

¹³ J.P. Park, *Art by the Book: Painting Manuals and Leisure Life in Late Ming China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2012).

and the artists' books that are almost always self-conscious about the structure and meaning of the book as a form.¹⁴

In East Asia, things were more practical than utopian. Resting comfortably within the material boundaries of a book, I contend that cover design actualizes its power by way of understatement. Veiled under an apparent decorativeness, book covers are less susceptible to interpretation. Moreover, there was a deep conviction in East Asia that only in elevated forms of art, namely, painting, calligraphy, and poetry could one embed aesthetic principles. During the modern period, China's long-held reverence for the medium of painting was further intensified by the newly imported concept of the *beaux-arts*. Although Tao Yuanqing was mainly known for his graphic work, critics in the Republican period always felt the need to validate the artist's merits through his paintings.

Lu Xun's conversion of an oil painting to a book design can be seen as an attempt to move away from notions giving primacy to painting. The process inevitably caused some loss of the painting's vibrant colors and the diminished scale reduced its visual impact. The resulting increase in circulation and popularization of these abstract designs, however, had a pivotal impact that far outweighed these losses. The book, as a medium, also drew an expansive network of intellectuals, artists, and entrepreneurs. The emergence of small, private publishing houses (book companies), a few of them owing their establishment to none other than Lu Xun himself, allowed for unusual cover designs to be created and circulated. The new text-image combination challenged the illustrative function that images traditionally served in China, since

¹⁴ Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books* (New York: Granary Books, 2004), 3-4.

the image and the book it decorates were conceived independent of each other. Unbound by conventions imposed upon painting, Tao Yuanqing was relatively free to create unusual images that would not have been possible in other mediums or at other times. While books did not cease to be proper books in China, their abstract covers served to sustain and, at the same time, deny a multitude of impressions.

The current enthusiasm for learning about the Republican period in mainland China, termed *minguo re* (literally, Republican China hot wave), registers a profound nostalgia for this unique moment in Chinese history, a moment characterized by cultural openness and internationalism. The current reprints of Lu Xun's novels, for example, are graced again by Tao Yuanqing's original cover designs. While this phenomenon is in line with the global trend of embracing retro culture nurtured by a discontent with present society, the situation in China is charged with the retrospective conviction that China was on the "right" political and cultural path in the Republican period, and that, if China had pursued this path of constitution and democracy, it would have become a different country. The history of suppression and revision since created an unbridgeable gulf between Republican China and the present.

Memories altered and evidence lost, the temporal distance and the dramatic political shift in subsequent history challenge accepted reconstructions of the period. The body of material used in my thesis presents a rare authentic glimpse of the artistic environment of the time. These materials include book designs, reproductions of paintings, records of sales and promotion by Lu Xun, and detailed accounts of Tao Yuanqing's art by contemporary writers and aestheticians published in a variety of newspapers and journals. Rather than isolating the art of Republican period from the present, I observe many shared elements between the design

culture in the 1920s and contemporary artistic practice. Xu Bing's (b. 1955) creation of pseudo-characters devoid of any semantic context in the 1980s, for instance, resonates with Tao Yuanqing's typographic inventions in the 1920s, which already sought to break free from the confines of Chinese scripts. The diaspora artist Huang Yongping (b. 1954) paradoxically utilizes cultural specificity to transcend cultural differences. His installation pieces question, in the same ways as does Tao Yuanqing's transformation of cultural-coded motifs, the definition and boundaries of the notion of national culture itself.

This dissertation examines the formation of modern Chinese design through Tao Yuanqing's work in four chapters. Chapter 1 relies on close analysis of the anti-symbolic quality of Tao Yuanqing's book cover designs and Lu Xun's own graphic and typographic experimentation. The meeting and collaboration of these two brought their intersubjective interests to a fruition that profoundly altered the convertibility between word and image. The inarticulacy and suspension of meaning born out of this new text-image amalgamation sought to condition a critical and self-conscious readership vis-à-vis more easily digestible commercial designs.

Chapter 2 charts the emergence of and developments in design that led eventually to the publication of Tao Yuanqing's design compendium in 1925. I contrast China's performance in world's fairs with domestic efforts to promote design in order to highlight the rich dissonances that occurred in the process of translating, processing, and domesticating design. Many placed hopes on design to make Chinese industrial and cultural production internationally competitive. Against this background, I argue that, by utilizing the inherent modularity in

traditional Chinese motifs, Tao Yuanqing let the metabolistic nature of design—a balance between building up and taking apart—present an alternative to the linear consciousness of growth and progress. The metamorphosis observed in his unexpected ways of adapting ancient art represents an isotropic notion of transformation and change.

The anti-symbolism and time-consciousness exhibited in Tao Yuanqing's work spurred debates on the function of art among literary figures. Chapter 3 discusses the connections writers and aestheticians drew between Tao Yuanqing's work and literary criticism. In particular, I examine how Tao Yuanqing's artistic creations were regarded as visualizations of aesthetic concepts such as pictorial beauty, childlikeness, and *jingjie* (empathy). The debate over intentionality frustrated the artist as he reworked familiar literary and visual motifs in his designs. While fulfilling a range of romantic ideals proffered by literary figures, Tao Yuanqing's work registers, in fact, not respect, but an implicit contempt for literary and aesthetic ideals, which he found to be subjects fit for parody. He does so by turning the technical constraints posed by the print medium to his advantage, using them to express desired visual effects.

Chapter 4 continues to explore the creative treatment of what were known as the *xiangtu*, or native soil motifs in his designs, which primarily decorate the cover of books of the native soil literary genre. Although working in Beijing and the cosmopolitan Shanghai, Tao Yuanqing's shared roots with Lu Xun and many writers in the provincial Shaoxing, a place historically known for its high concentration of scholars, deeply connected his work to themes such as repression, memory, and nostalgia. Through a comparative visual and textual analysis, I reveal how and why Tao Yuanqing's chic, almost burlesque cover designs contrasted with these difficult subjects tackled in the underlying books. Lu Xun's initiative of combining word and

image was well taken. Visual arts could get away with exhibiting an offensive levity against history and emotion in a way that writings could not.

Ultimately, my dissertation demonstrates how Tao Yuanqing and Lu Xun played with the precarious boundary between paradoxical forces: the ephemeral and the timeless, the provincial and the cosmopolitan, the national and the international. The resonance of these designs continues into the present, embodying and providing answers to the plights of modernity that remain at the heart of Chinese culture today.

Chapter One

Lost and Found: Lu Xun's Dilemma and Tao Yuanqing's Design Solution

Introduction: The Encounter

By December 1924, Lu Xun had finished translating Kuriyagawa Hakuson's literary criticism *Symbols of Depression* into vernacular Chinese. Through their common friend Xu Qinwen 許欽文 (1897-1984), he met the painter Tao Yuanqing as the manuscript awaits publication. Lu Xun, who had designed most of his own book covers prior to this moment, upon learning of Tao Yuanqing's rich experience as a graphic artist, asked the painter to design a cover for his forthcoming translated book. The morose yet beautiful design, as Lu Xun describes it, initiated a new artistic engagement in modern China.

The book cover, a medium more important than others for the writer, was no small matter in Lu Xun's career as a writer and cultural figure. As the material surface of a book, and the interface that marks the boundary between reality and literature, the book cover was crucial to the conditioning of the self-conscious readership envisioned by Lu Xun. In a letter to his writer friend Li Jiye 李霁野 (1904-1997), Lu Xun complained about the difficulty in acquiring book covers: "It seems that one is only capable of drawing a soldier on a horse dashing forward, as this is the representation of the so-called 'revolution, revolution!'"¹ For Lu Xun, the image of a reckless militant was nothing but a naïve visualization of revolutionary ideals.

¹ Lu Xun, "Letter to Li Jiye on 25 September 1925" in *Lu Xun shuxin ji* [Collection of Lu Xun's Letters] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1976), 163.

The crisis he experienced with writing in the 1920s motivated him to find alternative ways of expression via visual means. In particular, Lu Xun was bothered by the limitations of language, an anxiety shared by many intellectuals of the period. Unlike other writers, he was, however, not so concerned with the idea *yi zai yan wai*, or “meaning resides beyond words” that was meant to commend the subtlety of poetic language in the past. Lu Xun became increasingly preoccupied by the realization that while language helped communicate, it also blocked other ways of knowing. His writings from the early to mid-20s are replete with oxymoronic and paradoxical language that points to language’s own failure to communicate.² It is a constant struggle for him. Though his writings tend to evoke images, he sensed that the imagined images were never quite representable through language. On the difference between word and image, Williams Ivins claims:

While both words and pictures are symbols, they are different in many ways of the greatest importance. So little are they equivalent to each other that if communication were confined to either alone, it would become very limited in its scope. All words need definitions, in the sense that to talk about things we have to have names for them. Verbal definition is a regress from word to word, until finally it becomes necessary to point to something which we say is what the last word in the verbal chain of definition means. Frequently the most convenient way of pointing is to make a picture.³

Lu Xun could not quite pictorialize the image he was searching for before he met Tao Yuanqing in 1924. He hoped not for representations of revolution, but truly revolutionary

² On Lu Xun’s paradoxical use of language, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, “Wild Grass: The Impasse between Hope and Despair” in *Voices from the Iron House: A Study of Lu Xun* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), 89-109.

³ William Mills Ivins, *Prints and Visual Communication* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1969), 158-9.

Images—images that akin to what he termed *zhongjianwu*, or the “middle object.”⁴ According to this concept expressed in his writing, anything knowable in the world to us is merely one state of things in the long process of becoming. It was an impossible task and he deeply realized the paradox in rendering what was essentially a state of flux into visible forms— a failure he already recognized in the act of writing. Before he encountered Tao Yuanqing’s work, he had begun to experiment with book cover design himself as a way to at least undermine the conventional cultural structures that had determined the appearance of Chinese books and Chinese scripts. While the highly decorative covers attracted attention, his own designs seemed still insufficient to represent the unrepresentable in language.

The artist Tao Yuanqing was also not without preoccupation. The medium of the book cover itself was already a premise for abstraction as it was often seen as merely decorative. His preoccupation as an artist was in fact more manifest in his designs than in his paintings. His designs—unlike any cover designs prior to this period—were particularly susceptible to interpretation, due to both Lu Xun’s fame and his idiosyncratic, unsettling style. They provoked numerous debates on the nature and function of art during the period. Ultimately, they even exceeded Lu Xun’s expectation and made China’s most eloquent writer contradict himself. These book cover designs, multiplied and widely circulated, survived as a visual distillation reflecting different artistic and humanistic concerns at the height of the Republican period.

⁴ The term *zhongjianwu* appears in the postscript of Lu Xun’s essay collection *Fen* [The grave] in *Lu Xun quanji*, vol.1 [Collective Writings of Lu Xun] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1973), 259-266; 264. On the discussion of *zhongjianwu*, see Wang Hui, *Fankang juewang: Lu Xun de jingsheng jiegou yu Nahan Panghuang yanjiu* [Resistance, Despair: Lu Xun’s Mental Structure and the Studies on Nahan and Panghuang], (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1991), 132-190.

1.1 The Ineffable Image

At Tao Yuanqing's 1925 painting exhibition held in Beijing, Lu Xun's fascination with his art was shared by the Beijing University professor Qian Daosun 錢稻孫 (1887-1966), and Wang Baozhen 王葆楨 (1872-1925?), an obscure poet and calligrapher affiliated with the Southern Society (*Nanshe*). Unlike Lu Xun's commentary, which did not discuss in detail any of the exhibited works, Wang and Qian proffered vivid descriptions of the paintings, dwelling particularly on the original painting used as the cover for Lu Xun's translation of Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Symbols of Depression* (figure 2). "My ignorant self was not aware of such beautiful book cover design in China;" writes Qian, "it can truly stand for '*Symbols of Depression*.' Lush and curved lines convey unfathomable depth of meaning, the trident held by the dragon king throttles the neck, not a quick death, how depressing!"⁵ Wang Baozhen, on the other hand, had somewhat of a different interpretation, he writes: "[Symbols of] *Depression* is a work of design, which is the cover of the book *Symbols of Depression* translated by Mr. Lu Xun. It shows a woman licking the blood off of a trident with her tender tongue. We live in this horrible world, only love can cleanse the sins in the world; but how can this subtle love redeem our vulgar world?"⁶

While they both regarded the image as symbolic of the book's content, Qian saw it as a depiction of tortured death whereas Wang interpreted it as a subtle act of salvation against a sinful world. Neither gave a comprehensive description of the painting; they gravitated

⁵ Qian Daosun, "Kan Tao Xuanqing xiansheng huazhan de xiaoji [A brief record after viewing Mr. Tao Yuanqing's exhibition]." *Jingbao fukan*, 20 March 1925, 7. Tao Yuanqing's style name is Tao Xuanqing.

⁶ Shu Yan (Wang Baozhen), "Bu qi er yu [Unexpected encounter]." *Jingbao fukan*, 23 March 1925, 4-6.

towards what struck them the most, in this case, the juxtaposition of the female figure with a trident. The long shaft of the weapon, protruding beyond the circle, is held in place by a disembodied hand understood by Qian as that of the dragon king, emerging from the bottom left corner outside the scalloped circle. Qian's perceiving of the dragon king was likely triggered by the overall rhythmic effect produced by areas of curvilinear rendering. The undulating lines by her thigh, varying in thickness, seem to depict water's rippling effect echoing and echoed by the much starker wavy lines delineating the woman's hair. However, Tao Yuanqing's design contains much more than just the figure and the weapon. For instance, Qian and Wang made no mention of the puzzling, amorphous red shapes surrounding the naked figure, or the two strange squares on her hip hauntingly resembling a pair of staring eyes. Indeed, these aspects of the picture are the hardest to grasp and describe.

Wang Baozhen was perhaps more observant in noticing the overlap between the weapon and the small area of red which he saw as representing the woman's tongue stained with blood. According to Wang, she is not the one being executed, but, rather, is mitigating the violence by licking the blood off the prongs of the weapon. Yet, if one relates what had seemed to be a disembodied hand back to the figure's legs, truncated by the circle, the hand, so ambiguously depicted, suddenly appears to be the foot of the female figure, holding the trident that pokes back at her own head. A jarring gap between where the leg is amputated and where the wrist of the hand or the ankle of the foot emerges further allows the reading of the foot-hand duality. Here, one's insatiable need to suture disconnection somehow fails to mentally connect the visual discontinuity. Whichever way one reads the figure inside the circle, the encounter with the unaccountable blank space destabilizes what has just been understood. How

does one account for the haunting vacuum between an amputated limb and a disembodied hand/foot?

It is difficult to characterize the initial response to Tao Yuanqing's paintings, but the more one dwells on the work, the harder it becomes to elucidate. In the end, Wang and Qian could only parse that which carried their imagination beyond the painting itself. While explaining the picture as best he could, Qian also acknowledged that something in the design was deeply ineffable. The unusual motifs and idiosyncratic style created a complex image able to at once sustain and defy conventional systems of interpretation. The opacity of the image allows one to pluck any number of elements from it as one pleases and to supply a narrative that in turn confirms that interpretation. The inexhaustible interpretive possibilities serve to point at the unsettling darkness looming behind what seems to be an innocuous work of graphic design. In other words, the strange image "annuls metaphors through metaphoric excess."⁷ As Tao Yuanqing's fame grew quickly under Lu Xun's patronage, some readers openly denounced his book covers: "...the small figures he drew [the cover of *Symbols of Depression* for example], we cannot simply understand, cannot make out what it depicts!"⁸ Indeed, it was not symbolic infinity, but an interpretive impasse.

The merits of Tao Yuanqing's work lie elsewhere than in their symbolic meanings. Lu Xun was determined to promote his art—at once evocative and inscrutable—as the face and voice of his literary ambition. It was still an impressive novelty to organize a solo exhibition for an artist in 1925, let alone for a provincial one who had barely begun his career. Despite his

⁷ Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997), 32.

⁸ Wu Binqing, "Guanyu fengmian [On book covers]." *Kaiming*, (1928): 287-289.

active promotion of the artist, Lu Xun never attempted to *interpret* the paintings by describing what was being depicted. The writer made sense of his art, not by defining what Tao Yuanqing does, but, rather, by suggesting what he does *not* do. In the context of Tao Yuanqing's work, Lu Xun observed two kinds of *zhigu*, or "fetters" that prevented contemporary Chinese young artists from creating interesting works of art. The first was the desire to break away from China's burdensome tradition with those of other cultures. The writer believed that to borrow new motifs from, using the example he gave, ancient Egypt or native America was no different than reverting into China's own artistic traditions. The second was the obligation to accept and admire ostensibly tradition-breaking, bold, and rebellious works of art while not being entirely convinced that they represented better alternatives, thereby resulting in a lack of criticism of new forms of art. "Tao Yuanqing's art," writes Lu Xun, "is not bound by these fetters."⁹ The writer perfectly demonstrated and preserved the ineffability of Tao Yuanqing work by deliberately evading any direct description.

The genuine sensory experience when encountering Tao Yuanqing's art is to be described not interpreted. Being ineffable does not mean that they cannot be described, but his works challenged outdated vocabulary and logic of art criticism. How could an image of an amputated nude female licking on the blade of trident not be explained away with layers of symbolism? Yet, I would argue that by using elements that were most susceptible to symbolic interpretations, and then diluting the coherence of the symbols with more equivocal elements—

⁹ Lu Xun, "Dang Tao Yuanqing jun de huihua zhanlan shi wo suoyao shuode jiju hua [My comment on Tao Yuanqing's painting exhibition]," in Zhang Wang, ed., *Lu Xun lun meishu* [Lu Xun's Discussion on Fine Arts] (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 1956), 9-10. The essay was originally included in Lu Xun, *Er yi ji* [And That's That] (Shanghai: Beixin Book Company, 1928).

such as the amorphous red shapes and the strange squares in *Symbols of Depression* — the design unloads symbolism. Here lies the true sharpness of Tao Yuanqing's work. The liberating anti-symbolic quality was particularly astringent to the artistic climate in the 1920s. Lu Xun valued such qualities in art. He therefore allied literature to painting by commissioning the painter to create numerous book covers for himself and his friends because he sensed the potential that this new amalgamation of text and image could deliver what his writing alone could not.

Lu Xun had been pushing for a greater use of images in literature long before he met Tao Yuanqing. In reality, he embarked on his book cover project as early as he began his writing career in 1909. He was especially concerned with the interaction between image and text beyond the purely illustrative function that images conventionally performed. In the 1910s, he dramatically altered the appearance of modern book covers by breaking away from the age-old string-bound, vertical orientated convention. In the 1920s, his intensified manipulation of image and text served as a successful marketing strategy to compete with other publishers. During this time, he also placed hope in the capacity of a book's appearance to modernize readership as well as the society more broadly at a time characterized by waves of self-doubt and introspection as to how Chinese culture should be represented among the influx of national and international influences.

1.2 "Writing Characters is Drawing Pictures"

Much has been said about Lu Xun's predilection for painting. His childhood fascination with illustrations in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (*Shan Hai Jing* 山海經) was often cited by Chinese sources as the base for his later dedication to illustrations and cover designs. As a

writer, however, Lu Xun was ultimately more sensitive to writing than painting. His first intervention in the appearance of Chinese books was to eliminate the ubiquitous calligraphically inspired writings on the covers, as seen in the cover design of Jules Verne's science fiction *A Journey to the Center of the Earth* (*Didi lüxing*, 地底旅行) published in 1906 by Puji Book Company (figure 1.1). He was in Tokyo at the time and had encountered paperbound and letterpressed books.¹⁰ His design replaced the woodblock printed, calligraphy-inspired, vertically oriented standard book cover with block Chinese characters arranged in a horizontal fashion over an image of a volcanic eruption that Lu Xun allegedly borrowed from foreign journals.¹¹ The four Chinese characters do not align perfectly with each other, but gradually descend from right to left, creating a subtle visual dynamic with the image of an erupting volcano below. The title's red color contrasts with the blue background, which in turn offsets the white, foamy ocean and smoky volcano. One only has to compare it to another version of the same book to register the significance of Lu Xun's graphic and typographic intervention. The appearance of the concurrent version published by the Guangzhi Book Company follows the convention of Chinese books that hardly distinguishes one book from another (figure 1.2).

While still in Tokyo in 1909, along with his brother Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885-1967), he published *Collected Stories from Abroad* (*Yuwai xiaoshuo ji* 域外小說集). For its cover, Lu Xun selected an image, again from a foreign journal, depicting a woman playing harp against a

¹⁰ Many Chinese intellectuals in exile in Japan published influential books printed and bound in the modern portable format. See Jiang Deming, *Xin wenxue banben* [The Edition of New Literature] (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 2002), 1-5.

¹¹ Qian Juntao, "Zhuangzhen suotan [Small remarks on book cover design]," in Chen Zishan, ed., *Qian Juntao sanwen* [Qian Juntao's Prose] (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1999), 173-179.

backdrop of sunrise on the horizon (figure 1.3).¹² The woman's garment and accessories suggest her classical Greek origin, which in turn hints at the foreign and exotic nature of the enclosed literature (I will return to the subject of the image later on). The rectangular image only occupies the top register of the cover page, below which was the painter Chen Shizeng's 陳師曾 (1876-1923) inscription of the title *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji*. Lu Xun greatly admired the abstract nature of Chen Shizeng's calligraphy.

Also studying in Tokyo at the same time, Chen's inventive way of composing the title was considered by scholars an unprecedented modern adaption of calligraphy that was ahead of its time.¹³ Chen cleverly modified what looks like the traditional seal script with an abstract design the primary concern of which was the creation of visual balance. As a result, he omits the soil radical *tu* 土, the left half of the first character *yu* 域, which gives its meaning of "region" or "boundary" and alters it into the character *yu* 或 (also pronounced *huo*) that is homophonic with the character *yu* 域. As Yang Yi points out, this kind of meaning and sound being subservient to form underlies the key interest the classic work *Explaining and Analyzing Characters* (*Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字) held for modern Chinese society as explained by the philologist and revolutionary Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1868-1936) while he was in exile in Japan.¹⁴ While translating *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji*, Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren went to Zhang's informal lectures on the second century

¹² According to Zhou Zuoren's memoirs, Lu Xun culled this image from a German publication. See Zhou Zuoren, "Ruoxiao minzu wenxue [Literature of small nations]," in *Zhitang huixiang lu* [Zhitang Memoirs] (Dunhuang: Dunhuang wenyi chubanshe, 1998), 156-157.

¹³ Yang Yi, "Yuwai xiaoshuo ji de chaoqian xing [Ahead of its time, Yuwai xiaoshuo ji]," in Yang Yi, Nakai Masaki, and Zhang Zhongliang, eds., *Zhongguo xiandai wenxue tuzhi* [Pictorial of Modern Chinese Literature] (Beijing: Shenghuo dushu xinzhi sanliang shudian, 2009), 95-96.

¹⁴ Ibid.

classic supplied with Zhang's new vision of modern Chinese linguistics. According to Zhang, whenever the character *ji* 集 is used in the context of "gathering and collection (*jihe*)," then the character *ji* 厶 should replace the more complicated character *ji* 集, as it is on the cover of *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji* where Chen Shizeng reduced 集 into 厶.¹⁵

Lu Xun, the staunch promoter of vernacular Chinese, partook in the vigorous Chinese script reform that gathered force in the 1920s and 1930s. In an essay section "Writing Characters is Drawing Pictures (*Xiezi jiushi huahua* 寫字就是畫畫)," he bemoaned the laborious construction of Chinese characters, and that it was nothing but drawing pictures. "Take the character 'bao 寶 [treasure]' as an example," he writes, "one needs to draw a roof (宀), a string of jade (玉), a jar (缶), a seashell (貝), it requires four parts; the character for jar (缶), it appears to me, is further a composite of mortar and pestle (杵臼), then it requires five components in total."¹⁶ Like Lu Xun, many Chinese intellectuals saw the complexity of the Chinese script as one cause for the nation's backwardness. The impractical and sometimes illogical construction of the Chinese writing system created a linguistic barrier that prevented not only domestic cultural circulation but also the connection with the rest of the world. Though Lu Xun welcomed the Romanization movement of the Chinese script, he never gave up the effort to invent creative ways to rewrite the Chinese script. In the 1920s, Chinese literary scholars, as evidence to support the alphabetization of Chinese, revealed the misconception that the Chinese script was mainly pictographic. In fact, as Qian Xuantong 錢玄同 (1887-1939) claimed in 1922, the pictographs only

¹⁵ Zhou Shuren et al., Wang Ning, ed., *Zhang Taiyan shuowen jiezi shouke biji* [Class Notes of Zhang Taiyan's Lectures] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2008), 220.

¹⁶ Lu Xun, "Menwai wentan [Amateur discussion on wen]," in *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 6, 92.

represent one percent of Chinese characters. Most characters were created using the homophone system (*xingsheng*). Characters sharing the same sound could be written interchangeably. The ultimate importance of sound in Chinese language was used to support the implementation of pinyin.¹⁷

By the same token, one can reduce complex characters into any simpler arbitrary shape and give the shape the same sound. This logic underlies Lu Xun's choice for the homophonic and arbitrary in place of more complex characters in the title of *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji*. For Lu Xun, however, the radical structural simplification was not simply just a linguistic concern, but a visual one. The readability of a character was relegated to the periphery of the visual process. Meaning became subordinated to form. "Writing is drawing" in the sense that any arbitrary shape could be systematized into Chinese writing. Yet, the title of *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji*, written by the renowned calligrapher Chen Shizeng, was not so arbitrary due to its linguistic support provided by Zhang Taiyan. It also could not quite operate beyond the confines of calligraphic practice despite its tendency towards abstraction. As a non-practitioner of calligraphy, Lu Xun was determined to invent new ways of constructing Chinese characters himself later on.

He saw the medium of the book as the most effective to break away from the standardized calligraphic writing. The cover he designed for the fourth print of his short story collection *Call to Arms* (*Nahan* 呐喊) manifests a simple, yet profoundly bold, design aesthetic (figure 1.4). Against a rusty red ground, Lu Xun enclosed the title and his name in a small black rectangle within which a smaller rectangular frame is drawn to further block off the writing. He

¹⁷ Qian Xuantong, "Hanzi geming [Revolution of Chinese script]." *Guoyu yuekan*, 1:7 (1922): 5-22.

played with the shape and position of the three mouth radicals *kou* 口 to create an interesting visual rhythm as well as a semantic twist. The two by the side of the characters are slightly more plump and square than usual and are echoed by the third one appearing at the bottom of the character *han* 喊. The exaggerated shape of the mouth radicals seems to amplify the vocal power of the word that literally means outcry. The highly stylized diagonal strokes, “丿” and “㇏” in the *han* 喊 character hold the two mouth radicals in balance with their extended, almost horizontal lines. Beneath the title appears Lu Xun’s name in between what seems to be a pair of double angle brackets. In contemporary Chinese punctuation, the double angle brackets function as book title mark, but in Lu Xun’s rendering, they simply serve as ornamentations balancing the arrangement.

Two years later, in 1928, Lu Xun designed what might be the most playful of all his graphic works for his essay collection *And That’s That* (*Er yi ji* 而已集) (figure 1.5). By slightly modifying the dot strokes shared by the characters and connecting individual strokes where they should be separate, he created, again, a lively visual rhythm that oscillates between writing and drawing. As, perhaps, a witty critique of the inflexible and cumbersome construction of the Chinese script, he pressed the two characters *er yi* 而已 in the third row from the right closer to each other so that they mimic the top and bottom bipartite construction of the single character *lu* 魯, his adopted surname (appearing in the first row). The conspicuous colon fills the empty space and separates book title from author’s name. He broke strokes that should be connected and linked ones that should be separated. He also took liberty with the last character extending the vertical stroke in *ji* 集 with a shaded area followed by a whimsical dot trailing at the end.

One factor that brought Lu Xun and Tao Yuanqing's collaboration to fruition was their shared graphic intelligence in their re-construction of Chinese writing. Yet, in the case of Lu Xun, even in the extreme example of the *ji* 亠 character in *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji*, the character still retains its recognizability within the context of the title. The playful appearance of the characters do not jeopardize the semantic significance of the word. As a painter, Tao Yuanqing manipulated the structure of Chinese writing in more daring ways than the writer. Lu Xun usually asked the artist to design the title characters as well to avoid standardized typefaces, as in the case of Lu Xun's short story collection *Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk* (*Zhaohua xishi* 朝花夕拾) (figure 1.6).

The design and the title characters share similar short, rugged lines as their composing units. Certain strokes in the characters are extremely abbreviated. In the left half of the first letter *zhao* 朝, for instance, the middle section 日 is usually written as a square with a horizontal line in the middle. Tao Yuanqing replaced the square with a circle, and the horizontal line with a mere dot. At other places, some strokes are utterly omitted, such as the open top of the right half of the first character *zhao* 朝, which should be written with the top closed with a horizontal stroke. More drastically still, he rearranged the three parts that make up the second character *hua* 花 meaning flower. In standard writing of the 1920s, the character has a grass radical “艹” on top, “冫” at the bottom left and “匕” at the bottom right. Instead of the triangular structure, Tao Yuanqing aligned the three sections that comprise the character in a vertical fashion. He converted the “冫” to a boomerang-shaped pointy triangle with two short straight lines meeting at a right angle and disregarded the shape of the “匕” part by drawing a long vertical line with

two shorter horizontal lines branching out from it. The author's name "Lu Xun" appears above the design and was constructed in a similar fashion as the title.

Lothar Ledderose has suggested that since Chinese writing system is very modular, Chinese language already allowed for a great variety in size and relative position of the strokes. Even if we miss a bit of the information, recognition of familiar forms allows us to grasp the meaning of the whole unit all the same.¹⁸ Lu Xun's playful manipulation of the Chinese script, indeed, did not hinder the readability of the words. Tao Yuanqing's design, however, undermined the recognition of the character *hua* 花 even with the help of the context. Compared with Lu Xun's graceful graphic characters, Tao Yuanqing has a much more under-crafted, uncouth style that his contemporaries would likely compare with archaic scripts. Tao Yuanqing was, however, interested in playing with Chinese script's modularity in order to create new shapes, which were not derivatives of any particular calligraphic style. His graphic treatment of the characters surpassed the confines of script types and styles that had been the only descriptive, or rather, prescriptive language with which Chinese writings could be appreciated and evaluated. The significance of this intervention in Chinese writing went unnoticed at the time under the categorical guise of "design script" (*tu'an zi*)—a commercial typographic practice of Chinese characters whose structural simplification and decorative elegance required no need for deciphering.

In Tao Yuanqing's *deformation* of Chinese writing, there was little attempt to emulate classic pictographic writing nor a desire to revive a historical style that had characterized many

¹⁸ Lothar Ledderose, *Ten Thousand Things: Module and Mass Production in Chinese Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 15.

calligraphic practices since the late 19th century. His radical simplifications and reconfigurations of characters are evidence of a different motivation and goal than the calligraphic innovations prior to his time, best represented by the new stele-style calligraphy popular since the mid-19th century.¹⁹ This aesthetic appropriation of ancient scripts was championed by the prominent cultural figure Wu Changshi (Wu Changshuo) 吳昌碩 (1844-1927). He was the first president of the renowned Xiling Seal Society, a Hangzhou-based organization that sought to revive the art of seal carving. As a calligrapher, he was known for his adoption of the so-called “stone drum script” (*shiguwen*) originally used for stone carvings during the Qin dynasty (221 -207 B.C.). He revised the historicist style to imbue his calligraphy with an archaic and primitive vigor (figure 1.7). The controlled, rugged contours, the alternation between dry and wet ink, and the overall calculated unsophistication all belonged to the Chinese calligraphic tradition desperately revived and modified during this period. For Wu Changshi and his contemporaries, appeals to archaism and historicism presented the best means to resurrect and reinforce the Chinese cultural identity in the time of crisis. Ultimately, as suggested by Kuiyi Shen, his fundamentalist ideals were unable to meet the challenges of the modern period that required more proactive participation in new fields and new modes of art-making.²⁰

¹⁹ On the aesthetic appropriation of ancient calligraphy in late Qing, see Lothar Ledderose, “Aesthetic Appropriation of Ancient Calligraphy in Modern China,” in Maxwell K. Hearn and Judith G. Smith, eds., *Chinese Art Modern Expressions* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 212-245.

²⁰ On Wu Changshi’s antiquarian endeavor, see Kuiyi Shen, “Wu Changshi and the Shanghai Art World in the late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries” (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 2000). Also see Aida Yuen Wong, *Parting the Mists: Discovering Japan and the Rise of National-style Painting in Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 77-79.

The crisis and opportunity of Chinese script in the 1920s foreshadow the debate of the fate of Chinese language vis-à-vis the digital revolution today. Andrea Bachner reveals today's paradox:

The threat to language, reiterated incessantly by traditionalists, finds its expressive outlets increasingly in the fields of typographical book design, where the Chinese script of the future is envisioned in many instances as a fragmented script that is vanishing stroke by stroke. These designs, as typographically embodied reflections on the demise of the sinograph, often have a somewhat ironic side effect: in the interest of readability they communicate their message through a still recognizable medium, even as they spell out its death. In their visualization of a disappearing sinograph, these designs unintentionally point to the potential resilience of the script: Chinese characters remain recognizable even with several strokes missing.²¹

It went beyond just missing strokes in Tao Yuanqing's approach to updating Chinese art and writing. Using modular geometric units as building blocks, he could eventually collapse the difference between drawing and writing. For instance, the boomerang-shaped middle section of the character *hua* 花 in *Zhaohua xishi* reappears in the main design as the black bottom outline of the woman's robe. He further blurred the realm of writing with drawing by embedding titles within pictorial motifs. In the design of *Out of the Ivory Tower* (*Zōge no tō o dete* 象牙の塔を出て), discussed below, the series title *Weiming Congkan* 未名叢刊 is ingeniously integrated within the figural design (figure 1.8). The characters are constructed solely from wedges of varied size and proportion that are also the modular units used to render other motifs. In other words, Tao Yuanqing turns Chinese writing's pictographic property on its head — words and images resemble one another so long as they consist of the same organizing units. As such, he also freed the characters from the constraints of metal typesetting. The uneven edges of the

²¹ Andrea Bachner, *Beyond Sinology: Chinese Writing and the Scripts of Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 167-168.

characters simulate a carved effect, a quality that characterizes all of his work. He was concerned with preserving the “knife-like” brushwork he was known for as a painter in the print medium. In this manner, he left an authorial mark in the design, hand-made and mechanized at the same time. Adorning the book with a cover like this humanized the otherwise industrial object.

1.3 Old Image, New Context

Lu Xun drew his own cover designs from two main sources: foreign journals and portions of decorative patterns found on ancient funerary murals. In the early examples of *A Journey to the Center of the Earth* (1906) and *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji* (1909), he was borrowing images from foreign sources. In the 1920s, he began to experiment with traditional Chinese motifs.

In 1923, he designed the cover for his translation of Vasili Eroshenko’s (1890-1952) children’s play *The Pink Cloud* (*Tao se de yun* 桃色的雲) (figure 1.9). It was a simple horizontal band made of flying apsaras (a female spirit of the clouds) and birds intertwined with cloud patterns. It was an image Lu Xun recycled from an ink rubbing of the Wu Family Shrine in Shandong Province dated to the Eastern Han period (25 A.D – 220 B.C.). The ink rubbings were part of Lu Xun’s personal collection (figure 1.10). Whatever supernatural power the decorative pattern assumed in its original funerary context, the vehicle of the book divorced the image from previous references and granted it new life. The pink celestial pattern echoes and is echoed by the meaning of the title. The design’s ethereal quality serves to open one’s imagination to the children’s play underneath. There was an effort to match the cover image with the content insofar as they were both suggestive of clouds.

A year later, in 1924, Lu Xun again recycled patterns from Han dynasty tomb carvings for the cover of the journal *National Learning Quarterly* (*Guoxue jikan* 國學季刊) published by Peking University (figure 1.11). Unlike the cover of *The Pink Cloud*, which copied a whole design, the cover for the journal was a piecemeal design composed of three registers of different motifs. Two horizontal bands run across the top half of the page while the lower half is covered with geometric cloud pattern. The pattern on the top register mimics the shape of an elephant and tree-like vegetation occupies the lower register. To experience these funerary carvings in these decontextualized new form was a very radical move because it ran counter to the purpose of ink rubbings during the period.

Lu Xun's personal collection of ink rubbings reflects the trend of preserving Chinese national culture through widespread reproduction of historical artifacts. Images such as those collected by Lu Xun were reproduced either by Japanese scholars—two refined illustrative catalogues including the *Wu Family Shrine, Shina Santōshō ni okeru Kandai Fumbo no Hyōshoku* (*Catalogue of Han Dynasty Tombs in Shandong*, 1916) by Sekino Tei and *Shina Bijutsu Shi: Chōso hen* (*A History of Fine Arts in China: Sculpture*, 1915) by Ōmura Seigai²²—or by illustrated periodicals such as *Shenzhou guoguang ji* (*Chinese National Glory*, in twenty-one issues, 1908-1912, with its successor *Shenzhou daguan* in sixteen issues, 1912-22). Due to the burden of establishing a national cultural patrimony and an artistic canon comparable to that of Japan, the selection of these periodicals was based on antiquarian standards. For example, in the sections on rubbings, since a strong epigraphic interest dominated, artifacts with inscriptions and figurative motifs

²² Wu Hung, *The Wu Liang Shrine: the Ideology of Early Chinese Pictorial Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 47.

were favored over more “pure” decorative elements that were at the center of Lu Xun’s interest (figure 1.12). Although these compilations, as Richard Vinograd demonstrates, “document a transition from private antiquarian and collecting practices toward more public and institutional modes,”²³ the act of preservation and promotion of Chinese traditional culture itself was still limited to the orthodox evidential learning, or *kaoju* method focusing on textual authentication around the time when Lu Xun was borrowing them for graphic design. Whereas antiquarians struggled to decipher these imageries through iconographic identification, Lu Xun diverted the attention away from interpretation by transposing them to an entirely new medium.

The specific choice of motifs from Han dynasty tomb carvings was Lu Xun’s strategy to react against the kind of “cover art” that was meant to accommodate popular taste in Shanghai of the 1910s and 1920s. In the late Qing period, along with the genre of new popular fiction launched by Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) who believed that fiction exercised a power of incalculable magnitude over mankind, the art of cover design and illustration flourished. New technologies in the print industry greatly facilitated the popularization of the new fiction, especially represented by the “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School.”

The token publication of this literary genre, the weekly *Saturday* (*Libai liu*, 禮拜六 1914-16, 1921-24) was known for its repackaging of romantic stories consumed by the lower and

²³ Richard Vinograd, “Patrimonies in Press: Art Publishing, Cultural Politics, and Canon Construction in the Career of Di Baoxian,” in Joshua A. Fogel, ed., *The Role of Japan in Modern Chinese Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 263.

middle class citizens of Shanghai during their leisure.²⁴ To enhance the visual appeal of the magazine, the publisher hired the artist Ding Song 丁悚 (1891-1972) to create fanciful cover designs for every issue. Intended as visualization of the sentimentalism embraced by the “Mandarin Ducks and Butterflies School,” the most common motif was female beauty. On the cover of the October, 1914 issue, for instance, a young, beautiful “cover girl” is depicted looking away from the viewer (figure 1.13). Only her head is revealed to us. The diagonal partition conceals her body from our sight and, where we expect to see her body, the title and issue information of the periodical appear instead. The unevenly applied blue wash in the background enshrouds the girl with a sense of mystery. The genteel, affective image captured the sentimentalism of the popular romantic literature beneath, and thus cultivated visually the romantic yearnings and longings of potential readers. Geared towards a public ready to be mesmerized by romantic reverie, the magazine chose to market itself with a popular painting style that is simultaneously tantalizing and easily digestible.

There were several dimensions to Lu Xun’s discontent with contemporary graphic art and they all hinged upon the primary function that he saw in the graphic art: inculcating a new sensibility among modern average readers. Previous investigations of Lu Xun’s taste for the visual arts have primarily focused on his penchant for woodcuts, but he was much more complex and nuanced, and, perhaps, even conflicted in his artistic inclination. One must heed

²⁴ The first issue of *Saturday* came out on the Saturday of July 6, 1914 in Shanghai. Representing the popular literature genre “The Mandarin Ducks and the Butterflies,” the magazine’s content is dominated by sentimental romance, scandal expose, comic fictions, and detective stores. Concerning the magazine, see Timothy Wong, *Stories for Saturday: Twentieth-century Chinese Popular Fiction* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003).

the fundamental disjunctions that existed between Lu Xun's published beliefs and the actual works of art he personally loved. While he was critical of the sentimentality and romanticism in contemporary fiction and illustration, he was, nevertheless, fond of using female images for his own design. It was the divide between the popular and the elite in understanding the function of visual arts that bothered him. The attractive female figure that graced the cover of romantic novels and pictorials offered an enjoyable visual consumption that enhanced the comfortable and absorptive reading experience. Lu Xun was uncomfortable with the popular representation of the female body, but evaded the problem by turning to ancient motifs. He was perfectly surprised when Tao Yuanqing derived the effectiveness of his design from none other than the motif of the female body.

1.4 The Versatile Female Body

Returning to the harp-playing female figure gracing the cover of Lu Xun's *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji*, the sober, neo-classical style and the evocation of classic antiquity were more allegorical than emotive. The exoticism prevented one from identifying with the female figure and left the reader mystified by, perhaps, an ambiguous symbolism. The source of this particular image was unknown. However, we do know the source of a series of foreign images that Lu Xun allegedly traced around the year 1921, and donated to Beijing Lu Xun Memorial Museum by his brother in 1956.²⁵ The twenty vignettes were copied from the German translation of Paul Verlaine's poem selections published in Leipzig in 1906 (figure 1.14). Lu Xun

²⁵ Yang Yanli, "Guanyu Lu Xun yingxie de deguo shuji tu'an hua [On Lu Xun's tracings of German vignettes]." *Lu Xun yanjiu yuekan*, 8 (2006): 78-80.

traced them with the intention of adopting these in future publications. He also traced the image on the original leather cover depicting a gilt female head (figure 1.15). The title "*Gedichte Paul Verlaine*" is integrated into the female figure, enclosed by strands of her curvilinear, rippling hair. The gilt female body and the strong linearity and symmetry all reflect elements of the *fin-de-siècle* style of the Viennese Secessionists.

Among the other border designs that Lu Xun traced, the ornate, lush, and sinuous floral motif is very much redolent of the undulating form of the French Art Nouveau exemplified by the designs of Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939). Lu Xun was attracted to the visual dynamism of the expressive and organic form of Art Nouveau as well as the allegorical, even mysterious subject matters preferred by the Secessionists, both of which greatly impacted Japanese artists such as Tsuda Seifū and Kamisaka Sekka during the decade prior to Lu Xun's arrival in Japan.²⁶

The picture Lu Xun selected for *Yuwai xiaoshuo ji*, despite its archaic and mythological undertone, is much more subdued in sensuality than the average Art Nouveau or Secessionist imagery. The Greek figure is shown only to the shoulder level in a modest profile. One reason as to why he never actually used any of the images he traced from *Gedichte Paul Verlaine* was their explicit sexual content and abundance of female nudity. However eloquent Lu Xun was in his inquiry into the Chinese national character, he remained particularly reticent regarding the romantic and erotic dynamic in May Fourth subjectivity. He shunned away from the sensitive

²⁶ For a discussion on Viennese Secessionists' influence on Japanese artists, see Tsuchida Maki, "Meiji sanjū nendai no zuan [Design in Meiji 30's]," in Nagata Kenichi et al., eds., *A History of Modern Design in Japan 1860's - 1970's* (Kokubunji-shi: Bigaku shuppan, 2006), 100-119.

subject despite a profound awareness of the consequences of repressed and oppressed sexuality in traditional society.²⁷

Meanwhile, the subject of female nudity was arousing much public attention due to the nude model controversy at the Shanghai Art Academy. Its director, Liu Haisu 劉海粟 (1896-1994), a staunch modernist painter, publicly promoted the use of female nude models in drawing courses by widely advertising the need in Shanghai's newspapers. Concerned with public morality, Chinese authorities banned the use of female nude models at the school. The incident incited heated public debate on pedagogical necessity and moral corruption in art. Many joined the campaign because painting the nude, as argued by Julia Andrews, "considered by most twentieth-century art educators to be essential basic training in technique and anatomy, became a symbol of the West, of the modern, and of freedom."²⁸

I would argue that it was not the female nude as subject matter that caused the problem; rather, it was painting nudity in the European academic style (figure 1.16). What mattered was not *what* one drew, but *how* one drew. The popular painter and film director Dan Duyu 但杜宇 (1897-1972), for instance, included quite a few naked and nude female images in his *A Hundred Beauties* (*Bai mei tu* 百美圖) published in 1922 and 1923. Under the guise of a display of female fashion, Dan Duyu's nude female beauties could get away with eroticism. The poetic verse accompanying each image also justified the nudity with proper context. In one such image, the viewer is granted both the frontal and back view of a naked female, barely wrapped in a robe

²⁷ Kang-I Sun Chang, ed., *Cambridge History of Chinese Literature Volume II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 475.

²⁸ Julia F. Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, *The Art of Modern China*, 67.

who contemplates her appearance in front of a mirror (figure 1.17). The fresh-out-of-bath context indicated by the poetic verse above warranted the stark nakedness.

In academic drawings such as one painted by Xu Beihong 徐悲鴻 (1895-1953) in the conventional French *beaux-arts* manner (figure 1.16), the attention paid to anatomy, especially the musculature and solidity of form, destroys the soft, delicate femininity customary in the Chinese depiction of the female. The images Lu Xun traced from *Gedichte Paul Verlaine* can be seen as a compromise between the two traditions. The decorative nature of the German designs diminishes eroticism of the female nude. They were also drawn in a much more linear and abstract manner, naturally rendering them more feminine for the Chinese. But Lu Xun still hesitated to use these images. He finally overcame the reluctance to exhibit nude females when he first saw Tao Yuanqing's design for the abovementioned *Symbols of Depression* (1924). In fact, female nudity became a dominant motif in the designs Tao Yuanqing created for Lu Xun (Tao Yuanqing did not use naked females in designs he made for other writers.)

1.5 Form versus Formless

Tao Yuanqing's second cover design for the book *Out of the Ivory Tower* is no less puzzling than the one for *Symbols of Depression*. *Out of the Ivory Tower* was the second work of Kuriyagawa Hakuson translated by Lu Xun and published in 1925 (figure 1.8). The cover again depicts a female nude who, somewhat startled, leans against what first appears to be a wall defined by a wavy and wriggly border. Small dots, dashes, and triangles run through the wall surface and give it the texture and appearance of a tree trunk. The rough, barky texture fits well with the overall angularity of the woman's body. In the form of a circular seal, the artist's

signature appears partly within the curved border line and partly outside of it. The motif is framed by an uneven horizontal line on top and another at the bottom. The horizontal line at the bottom cuts the female nude off at her ankles—not unlike the mutilation of the female nude on the cover of *Symbol of Depression*. Below the horizontal line and in place of the cut-off feet, a row of short, sharp, and parallel triangular lines are arranged to fill in for the visual as well as conceptual discontinuity.

Just as one is satisfied with the above characterization of the design, one also realizes something strange about the proportion and composition. The head with the pair of startled eyes could not possibly belong to the nude body, and is indeed likely the head of a male figure supporting the female nude with his body that has morphed into a tree-trunk or a speckled pattern. Suddenly, one makes out the head of the female nude as well, nudged between a hand and her black hair. Three dashes are used to suggest her eyes and mouth. Compared with the gaping eyes of the male figure, she seems to have closed her eyes and her tilted head suggests a state of unconsciousness. Discerning the boundary of the two figures does not suffice to explain other peculiarities in the picture. For instance, it is unclear what the hand-like shape in between the two heads is supposed to be doing or even to whom it actually belongs. The uneasy void between where the man's head appears and where the contour of the nude's back ends creates a visual and mental breach—much like the disconcerting gap in *Symbols of Depression*— that impedes one's coherent reading of the image.

The covers for *Out of the Ivory Tower* and *Symbol of Depression* share the motif of the close-eyed female nude with perplexing bodily mutation and mutilation. The nudity, however, becomes less conspicuous against so many other peculiarities I have discussed so far. As noted

above, neither Wang Baozhen nor Qian Daosun even mentioned the nude factor in their observation of *Symbols of Depression*. The main motif of the female nude is accompanied by shapes and figures whose inarticulate and amorphous forms are more provocative than the female nude itself. What is at issue in the designs was not the female nude—albeit a sensitive motif around the year 1924—but the peculiar juxtaposition of structure and non-structure, or form and non-form. What I mean by structure is the immediately recognizable motif in the design, the female nude in the two examples above. The trident in *Symbols of Depression* is also a structure that attracts one's attention. The non-structure, however, ranges from biomorphous shapes to idle strokes that seem to be solely decorative, and have no descriptive function vis-à-vis the main motifs. Here I borrow Georges Bataille's idea of the "formless (*informe*)," a notion that particularly resonates with certain impulses in Tao Yuanqing's design.²⁹ Bataille refuses to define "formless" in a "dictionary" entry that "no longer gives the meanings of words, but their tasks." "Thus *formless*," he continues, "is not only an adjective having a given meaning, but a term that serves to bring things down in the world, generally requiring that each thing have its form. What it designates has no rights in any sense and gets itself squashed everywhere, like a spider or an earthworm."³⁰

As an effective means to sabotage the academic world and the spirit of system, Bataille uses the conventional dictionary format to perform the resistance of definition. Yve-Alain Bois explains that "formless" can be a useful interpretive tool for modern art created throughout the

²⁹ Bois and Krauss, 9.

³⁰ Georges Bataille, "Informe" *Documents* 7 (December, 1929): 382. I use Yve-Alain Bois' translation of the passage.

20th century. As an operation (not a theme, nor a substance, nor a concept), it renders the division of “form” and “content” useless as conceptual categories.³¹ Since the term was to declassify things and “to bring things down in the world,” it defies definition. It is not a “stable motif, a symbolizable theme, a given quality, as it is a term allowing one to operate a declassification.”³² In other words, it serves to question the validity of definition itself. At the core of Bataille’s idea is his denial of symbolic value. Then how does one still *represent* without attaching any symbolic value? How intelligible is the world to us?

What connects Bataille with Tao Yuanqing is the link between form and perception. It is without coincidence that Tao Yuanqing was also fascinated by the earthworm. “An earthworm is cut into two earthworms, they spring apart, indeed like two earthworms!”³³ In Tao Yuanqing’s short poem, he expresses the delight at the regenerative ability of the segmented creature. The earthworm stood for Tao Yuanqing, not as an easily squashable abject invertebrate, but an organism that embodied the “formless” (although it still has to be rendered into certain shape) and the potential of self-growth. In one design he made for his friend Xu Qinwen’s book *It Seems This Way* (*Fangfu ruci* 仿佛如此), the sinuous, tubular shapes seem to be crawling towards the equally featureless figure (figure 1.18). The slanting single eye, eyebrow, and mouth render the figure more monstrous than human. The two well defined triangular mounds further offset the lack of definition in the earthworm-like organisms and the figure. Tao

³¹ Bois and Krauss, 9.

³² Ibid., 18.

³³ “一蚓斷作兩蚓，真個同兩蚓般的各自跳開了！” Tao Yuanqing, “Xisha [Fine sand].” *Yaboluo* [Apollo], 3 (1928): 64.

Yuanqing was interested in imbuing the static image with a sense of flux and metamorphosis. The challenge was to give expression to the ever-morphing potential in the animated beings. One of his students recalled how Tao Yuanqing demonstrated this principle in class: “he would first draw a five-petalled plum blossom, then we watched how the blossom became circular, triangular; it then turned into a long butterfly, finally the butterfly morphed into a morning glory.”³⁴

An underlying goal he hoped to achieve with design was to express the potential of a process, of growth, of forms not quite in any fully-identifiable and articulate manifestations, and never destined to be. He still had to render them into visible forms, albeit formless as in the example of the un-nameable amorphous red shapes and floating wriggly lines in *Symbols of Depression*. Ultimately, one cannot quite make sense of the design by just dwelling on the naked female and the trident. The “formless” in the design serves to point to the very futility of the attempt to derive symbolic values out of the immediately recognizable motifs. These scattered formless elements function like what T.S. Eliot refers to as floating feelings, which have a, by no means, obvious affinity to the dominating tone or the whole effect of a poem. It is the combination of these floating feelings with the core emotion that generate a new art emotion.³⁵

The metamorphosis of the male figure in *Out of the Ivory Tower* functions in a similar way. The combination of a male and a swooning female nude may allude to the classic icon of Adam and Eve; Tao Yuanqing, however, by reducing the male figure’s physical depiction into a

³⁴ Wang Zhaoqian, “Jinian wode jiaoshi Tao Yuanqing xiansheng [In memory of my teacher Tao Yuanqing].” *Yiban*, 9:2 (1929): 275-279.

³⁵ T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and Individual Talent,” in *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry & Criticism* (London: Methuen; New York: distributed by the USA by Harper & Row, 1960), 57.

flat pattern, diminishes the motif's biblical reference. Not unlike the recycling of motifs from ancient bronzes (discussed further in Chapter 2), he was apt to transform heavily codified imageries into neutral design patterns. The mechanism by which he achieved such transformation was to lend the design a sense of self-enabled process of change. In other words, he uses pictorial devices to grant the design the illusion of potential energy, whereby it appears to be ever on the verge of evolution. By doing so, he destabilizes any symbolism associated with the icon. Therefore, the design for *Out of the Ivory Tower* is less concerned with iconographic context or female nudity than with its intrinsic visual appeal, and the clever metamorphosis of the male figure at its heart. On the cover of *Symbols of Depression*, the inherent dynamism is enabled by the scalloped circle which gives the illusion of rotating movement, its formative momentum generating and churning what is enclosed within.

"The formless" was best experienced in excess. The cover Tao Yuanqing designed for *To the Stars* (*Wang xing zhong* 往星中) was an incisive attack on the assumptions of meaning (figure 1.19). Within the double scalloped circles, one confronts a world of fragmentation teeming with varieties of mark-making: straight lines, curves, arches, squares, triangles, grid, and many other shapes difficult to name. The image seems to defy any logic. The chaos, however, intrigues and urges one to parse to the extent of what is actually discernable. Amidst the anarchy of shapes, the only distinct motifs are the nude figures depicted stretching out along the inside of the left half of the circle. The figures are all connected to each other, some assuming more integral shapes while others remain as fragmented limbs. The rest of the design is made of short and rough-edged lines alternating between red and black, curved and straight. In the center of the composition, three rectangles, one in red and two in black, lead to a fence-like structure above

which we see the familiar vertical undulating lines, with black lines bracketing a short red one. To its right, two lines converge to form a triangle, enclosing scattered red dots and a grid-like structure under which black and red squares alternate. The double scalloped circle is pierced through the right side by a triangle much in the same way as the trident penetrates the circle on the cover of *Symbol of Depression*. Below the red triangle, he signed his name “Yuanqing 元慶” in the knife-like strokes comparable to the non-representational linear elements within the circle. A recurring element in Tao Yuanqing’s design, the circle is a convenient pictorial device with which to enclose a world of fragmentations.

Tao Yuanqing’s friend and fellow artist Qian Juntao 錢君匋 (1906-1998) likened the cover design of *To the Stars* to a beautiful starry dreamscape.³⁶ For romantics like Qian, the creative process is something mystical and elusive; the disarray is precisely a testament to the power of the artist’s imagination. The web of free-floating, seemingly unrelated elements kept within a visual rhythm was even regarded as a musically inspired composition. Similar to what painting was to the Russian abstract painter Vassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), Tao Yuanqing’s work was also appreciated for an aesthetic predicated upon relational composition rather than meaningful context. The humanist artist and educator Feng Zikai 豐子愷 (1898-1975) proposed that when looking at works of art by Tao Yuanqing, one must take the attitude of a music listener; the melody, the tempo, and the harmony of the chords are what make good music, its theme and symbolism are supplementary to its beauty. By the same token, the harmony of shapes, colors, and hues—the so-called pictorial beauty—is what makes a painting beautiful. Its

³⁶ Qian Juntao, “Tao Yuanqing lun [On Tao Yuanqing],” in *Qian Juntao sanwen*, 101-109.

formal likeness and meaning are secondary to pictorial beauty (further discussed in Chapter 3).³⁷

Despite the abstraction, the cover design of *To the Stars*, however, can hardly be equated to Kandinsky's cosmic world in which forces are kept in equilibrium. In Tao's design, things are not quite kept in visual balance. It is not a harmonious symphony, but an unsettling cacophony. The shapes are not strictly geometric. They do not even seem to be quite on the same plane. The quasi-squares and rectangles all appear to warp as if viewed from diverse perspectives. After making out the shapes of the female nudes, one is reluctant to see the rest of the design simply as non-representational, independent units that take on a life of their own, and is compelled to think of them as part of a larger construction. As soon as one concedes to its overall non-representational value, the female nudes themselves begin to dissolve into limbs and breasts, and, gradually, into lines and dots.

To the Stars is a stage play written by the Russian playwright Leonid Andreyev (1871-1919) and translated into Chinese in 1926 by the aforementioned young writer Li Jiye. It was published alongside *Out of the Ivory Tower* by the newly established Weiming Society 未名社, a publishing house dedicated to translating foreign literature. Thanks to the attractive book covers, young, small publishing houses like the Weiming Society were able to compete with large publishers such as the Commercial Press 商務印書館 and Zhonghua shuju 中華書局.³⁸ Lu

³⁷ Feng Zikai, "Introduction to Tao Yuanqing's painting." *Xiaoshuo yuebao* (The Short Story Magazine), 19: 1 (1928).

³⁸ On the emergence and significance of private-own publishing houses, see Ling A. Shiao, *Printing, Reading, and Revolution: Kaiming Press and the Culture Transformation of Republican China* (Ph.D. Diss., Brown University, 2009).

Xun oversaw the translating and publishing process and requested Tao Yuanqing to make a cover design for the book. The name of the literary society “Weiming”, meaning “not yet named,” embodies the group’s spirit against fixation and definition.³⁹

Tao Yuanqing’s designs speak for the resistance towards allusion and symbolism by revealing the precarious connection between form and perception. Lu Xun realized this goal was difficult to achieve through writing alone. “Although the decay of classical education was to make the allusive literary language obsolete,” Tsi-an Hsia argues, “any writer aware of the literary or cultural heritage he shares with his audience inevitably makes some use of allusion, the symbolic reference to a literary work or to a historical or legendary episode.”⁴⁰ Out of all visual possibilities, design was particularly conducive to removing any cultural and historical specificities of icons. The covers decorating the books made and sponsored by China’s foremost cultural figure were nevertheless susceptible to interpretation. The powerful initial visual encounter would likely turn into frustration. By thwarting the interpretive effort, Tao Yuanqing’s work attacked the foundation of Chinese culture at the very point where it believed itself to be best protected—in this case, by pointing to the futility of allusion, the utility and necessity of which had been so intricately woven into the history of Chinese visual and literary art.

³⁹ On the relationship between Weiming society and Lu Xun, see Li Jiye, *Lu Xun xiansheng yu weiming she* (Beijing: Renmin wenxue chubanshe, 1984).

⁴⁰ Tsi-an Hsia, *The Gate of Darkness: Studies of the Leftist Literary Movement in China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1968), 147.

Coda: Double Vision

The contempt for formal likeness has been a familiar discourse in Chinese art, made famous by the Northern Song scholar poet Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101) in the first couplet of a poem: "If anyone discusses painting in terms of formal likeness, his understanding is nearly that of a child."⁴¹ The attention to elements other than formal likeness facilitated the infusion of codified meanings in painting. Tao Yuanqing's complete disregard of codified meaning, therefore, represented a great departure from Chinese art tradition. How does one, then, understand an image that does away with conventional frames of reference? Other than Qian Juntao and Feng Zikai's romantic reading of Tao Yuanqing's designs, many naturally attempted to understand them in connection with the book's content, hoping correlation between the two would clarify the image. As mentioned earlier, both Wang Baozhen and Qian Daosun saw the cover of *Symbols of Depression* as a representation of a deeply troubled psyche. This interpretation was likely influenced by the Freudian tone of the book. Both *Symbols of Depression* and *Out of the Ivory Tower* spelled out the Freudian and Bergsonian belief of the motivation for artistic creation (discussed further in Chapter 3). They locate the ultimate driving force of artistic creation in the melancholy resulting from depression and oppression of the life force. Art is capable of creating a world of individuality with total imaginative freedom and art can project mental images through concrete "symbols."⁴²

⁴¹ "論畫以形似 見與兒童鄰." Susan Bush, *The Chinese Literati on Painting: Su Shih (1037-1101) to Tung Ch'ang (1555-1636)*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Studies, 27 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 26.

⁴² Eugene Y. Wang, "Tope and Topos: the Leifeng Pagoda and the Discourse of the Demonic," in Lydia H. Liu, Judith T. Zeitlin, and Ellen Widmer, eds., *Writing and Materiality in China: Essays in Honor of Patrick Hanan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 529-530.

In reality, many contingencies affected the correspondence between the cover and the content of a book. As a design principle, Tao Yuanqing constantly recycled similar motifs for different books. The motifs themselves could not have been making allusions to the content of every book. In the example of the conversion of the painting *Big Red Robe* to a cover design, the image preceded the actual book. For the design of *To the Stars*, on the contrary, Lu Xun gave Tao Yuanqing a rather detailed synopsis of Andreyev's play. He nonetheless wrote at the end of the synopsis that the play's content was only for Tao Yuanqing's reference, and that the artist should feel complete liberty in creating the image, even one completely unrelated to the content.⁴³ As for *Out of the Ivory Tower*, Lu Xun simply suggested using a design that Tao Yuanqing had already made and which was, therefore, conceptually isolated from the book's content from the point of view of the artist.⁴⁴ The cover was initially made as a cover that could be used for any publication that was part of the *Weiming Series* (series of translations of foreign literature published by the Weiming Society), hence the embedded art script *Weiming Congkan* within the design itself.

There was always a concern of how a design was matched with a book and vice versa. Since Lu Xun cared so much about the visual power of the cover image in relation to the writing, he engineered particular combinations of text and image to produce his desired effect. Tao Yuanqing's modular construction and highly abstract style facilitated the manipulation. Though Lu Xun usually made the final decision, Tao Yuanqing did not always follow the writer's direction. When asking for a cover design for his essay collection *The Grave* (*Fen 墳*), Lu

⁴³ Lu Xun, *Lu Xun shuxin ji*, 74-76.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

Xun specified that anything would do as long as the design was not in any sense related to the idea of the grave.⁴⁵ In the end, Tao Yuanqing painted none other than a gravesite, delighting the writer despite being contrary to his stated desire (figure 1.20).

Lu Xun feared one-to-one correspondence between the title and image because it would risk reducing the function of the image to pure illustration. Tao Yuanqing's design convinced the writer that an image could echo the book's title without being solely explanatory. The best way to prevent a cover image from being simply illustrative was not by way of eschewal, but by demonstrating how image's conventional, purely illustrative function could be turned on its head. Without the context of the book, it is not apparent that the design must be recognized as representing a gravesite because of its remarkable minimalism and abstraction. A figure is seen kneeling in front of two conical-shaped mounds that are identical with the mounds appearing on the aforementioned cover of *Fangfu ruci* (figure 1.18). Three thinner conical shapes were also included in the design and they could be read as trees with grey dots branching out from the trunks.

This effort to describe re-enacts the predicament of such an endeavor. Were these geometric motifs to be read as figure, grave, and trees? Lu Xun likened the compilation of *The Grave* with essays written between 1907 and 1925 to "building a small new grave in order to bury the past, as well as to yearn for the past."⁴⁶ Unlike the underground tomb, the grave, built as small mounds above ground, served as the visible marker of the dead for the living. Through an act of commemoration, the grave became a site where memories were fused with emotions

⁴⁵ Ibid., 99-100.

⁴⁶ Lu Xun, *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 1, 11.

and imaginations. It was through a process of self-burial that the essay collection was created. It was created at the moment when Chinese intellectuals were positing the relationship between classical and vernacular Chinese. Some believed that Lu Xun's vernacular Chinese was informed by his profound knowledge of classical Chinese. He was greatly infuriated by such statements, for he spent his career advising Chinese youth not to read classical Chinese at all and translating foreign literature into vernacular Chinese for them.

Yet, there was no denying his own classical past. *The Grave*, including his essays written in classical Chinese, vernacular Chinese, and a strange hybrid language bore witness to his struggle. Lu Xun's attempt to spread vernacular Chinese in writing does not mean a transcription of spoken language into literary forms, rather, he is interested in crafting a new written language that would transform the casualness and relative inelegance of spoken Chinese into new expressions with which to comprehend modern conditions. As Tsi-An Hsia argues, Lu Xun let vernacular Chinese do things that it had never done before—things not even the best classical writers had ever thought of doing in classical Chinese.⁴⁷ *The Grave* was a synergy embodying the introspection gained through such reconfigurations of the old and new, past and present. This introspection makes up the postscript appended to the book in which he coined the notion of *zhongjianwu*, the “middle object.” The writer believed that the process of transformation must yield visible markers that make transparent that transformation. The book that revealed the immeasurable “middle objects” is in itself a “middle object.”

⁴⁷ Hsia, 151.

It ultimately meant little whether one identified the geometric shapes in the cover design as representations related to *The Grave*. The representation of graves is conceptually less tied to the literary work beneath than is Tao Yuanqing's use of design's language to highlight the tension and cohesion between classical and vernacular, past and present, ancient and modern. Through an interplay between positive and negative space, the design visually enacts the superimposition of past onto present explored by Lu Xun in print.

A small, white triangle appears where the two conical mounds overlap, but could it not also be the apparition of the missing corner in the smaller mound where the edge of the book abruptly cuts off the design? The design, as flat as it is, tricks one's perception of space. Are the two smaller white conical shapes rising from between the two grey mounds? Or, if one regards them as trees, do they recede into space compared with the singular thin conical shape in the "foreground?" The green bubble literally *enclouds* the design, separating it conceptually from the realm of the book; or, does it do the inverse, as the silhouette of a cutout cloud shape that tantalizes one's desire to read what is underneath? The artist signs his name "Yuanqing" with a small black circle lying halfway in and halfway out of the design, revealing himself at the liminal point between the realms of design and literature. Yet, the sharp manipulation of form and perception exerts its power by way of understatement. The cover's seemingly decorative function masks the design's intricacies despite the initial visual appeal. The two-way reading of space might not be apparent until one sees past the representational aspects of the design. Once that threshold is crossed and design's own operative language takes over, one would never be able to look in the same way again.

Chapter Two

Loss and Gain in Translation: the Advent of Modern Chinese Design

Introduction: Chinese Ancient Designs (1925)

In 1925, Tao Yuanqing helped compile what may be the first compendium of Chinese design motifs: *Chinese Ancient Designs* 中國圖案集 (Figure 2.1). Making its ambitions explicit, the bilingual book identifies “the cultivation of the art of designing” as key to improving Chinese-made commodities. The project partook in the global effort to restore the artistic merit of mass-produced goods, but was also inflected by the evolving notions of art within China and borrowings from its own history of design on ancient ritual bronzes. Within the book, Tao Yuanqing reproduced line drawings of these elemental patterns and used them as building blocks to construct increasingly intricate patterns as the pages unfold. Thanks to the flowing and modular quality inherent in the metal work, the ritual bronzes already possessed a semi-industrial appearance that lent itself to such treatment and, in the book’s editor Ge Gongzhen’s words, “bears a resemblance to and some significance in Modern Design.”¹

The rhetoric of modern design de-emphasizes the semantic and symbolic dimension of the content; one was expected to appreciate the linear patterns extracted from ancient bronzes exclusively for their decorative value, and, eventually, to be desensitized of the narrative associated with these motifs. *Chinese Ancient Designs* appeared at a moment when most in China subscribed to a particular notion of art, a notion that gave primacy to painting. The medium

¹ Ge Gongzhen, Preface to *Chinese Ancient Designs* (Shanghai: Youzheng Book Company, 1925).

was seen as the flagship of art institution. The primacy of painting resulted from both the external influence of the French hierarchy of the *beaux-arts* and the long-held internal reverence for the medium of painting. Painting had always been considered as an elitist practice when the term “three perfections” (*sanjue*) was coined during the eighth century in praise of the Tang poet Zheng Qian’s (d.764) excellent skills in painting, poetry, and calligraphy.² In the Republican period (1911-1949), however, painting trumped poetry and calligraphy due to its direct visual immediacy.

Direct contact of Chinese scholars with the Western academic tradition of fine arts in Europe and via Japan (where a higher premium value was placed on painting until the beginning of the 20th century) further enhanced this dominance.³ In art criticisms of the 1920s, the term *meishu* (fine arts), *yishu* (art), and *huihua* (painting) were often used interchangeably. Appearing in this period when concern over how Chinese painting should modernize itself in the face of different streams of influence dominated, the 1925 publication of *Chinese Ancient Designs* represented a refreshing departure from the overbearing concentration on the medium

² Qi Gong, “The Relationships between Poetry, Calligraphy, Painting,” in Alfreda Murck and Wen Fong, eds., *Words and Images: Chinese Poetry, Calligraphy and Painting* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 11.

³ In Europe, conventional expectations of a work of art, especially of painting was vehemently attacked for its favor of the “pure visibility” by artists throughout the 20th century. For example, Marcel Duchamp denounced the pure optical by creating the *Anémic Cinéma* in 1926 that played with optical illusion interspersed with puns in French. Alexander Rodchenko announced the “death of painting” in 1921 by reducing the art of painting into three primary colors. He painted three canvases into pure red, blue, and yellow. Freed himself from the burden of representation, he moved onto more Constructivist work. Yet, as Rosalind Krauss suggests, “an art which, no matter how radical its forms might be, was tying itself ever more securely to the traditional categories of painting first, and then sculpture.” See Yve-Alain Bois and Rosalind E. Krauss, *Formless*, 134.

of painting. Tao Yuanqing's example of the return to modular construction, geometric principles, and abstraction informed by historical sources altered the course of Chinese art.

Although *Chinese Ancient Designs* voiced a very different solution to the perceived backwardness of Chinese visual representation, its publication in January 1925 was nonetheless the culmination of a pre-existing popular and institutional practice of design originated even before the term and its Chinese translation *tu'an* 圖案 were stabilized around the year 1920. It is necessary to trace not only the initial stages of design/*tu'an* before it became defined as such and also how it was conceptualized in relation to other forms of visual arts as its definition evolved under larger changes in the social and cultural structures. The concept of decorative art was not new to China in the early 20th century, the term *tu'an*, however, or, more precisely, the combination of "tu" and "an" and its English equivalent *design* were new to China. Design was first treated, along with other practical subjects such as chemistry and mining, as an imported subset of modern science in its early conceptualization. In the preface of *Chinese Ancient Designs*, the editor Ge Gongzhen still referred to design as a field that "occupies no unimportant niche in the realm of modern sciences."⁴ Like all subjects related to science and technology, it was mobilized for the sake of nation-building in the late Qing period. As a result, traditional Chinese crafts such as embroidery and pottery, despite little change in manufacturing processes, were conceptually regarded as the manifestation of modern design because they seemed to already embody the aesthetic and technical dimensions required for modernizing the nation.

⁴ Ge Gongzhen, preface to *Chinese Ancient Designs*.

In the early Republican years, commercial necessity required many painters to make a living by doing stage and graphic designs. The field was then conceived as having more affinity to painting than to industry. In 1918, design was officially institutionalized as an artistic practice parallel to painting, and, like painting, took on symbolic meanings. To understand how design evolved from an essential industrial component subsumed under the Qing government's statecraft into a sub-field of fine arts in the early Republican period is to identify the tensions, the misalignments, and the confusions manifested as Chinese intellectuals struggled to make sense of the new concept. In order to trace this complex development of design that eventually led to the publication of Tao Yuanqing's design compendium in 1925, I present seven contexts that best serve to illustrate the history of design in China. The rich dissonances that occurred in the process of reception, processing, and domesticating design offer a useful lens to study the problems of Chinese modernity more broadly. At the end of the chapter, I will return to Tao Yuanqing's *Chinese Ancient Designs* and demonstrate how design consciousness, veiled under the guise of an apparent historical revival, reflects a radical breach from the vogue of observational art at the time.

2.1 The Price of Self-orientalizing

In Europe, the concept of industrial arts was closely tied to the economic competition among nations. Under the influence of the 19th century social Darwinian philosophy, Japan, and China, too, determined that a robust arsenal of exports was needed for a country to thrive and compete with the West. The world expositions created a system within which to showcase comparatively the various merits of artistic traditions as expressed through their industrial arts.

Japan first confronted the idea of industrial arts at the 1873 Universal Exhibition in Vienna where the Japanese delegation coined the word *bijutsu* 美術, meaning beautiful arts, to appropriate the term *Kunstgewerbe*, *Kunst*, and *bildende Kunst*, three different German terms in the official program.⁵ *Kunstgewerbe* clearly denotes applied art whereas *bildende Kunst* is a more general term for anything within the confines of pictorial arts. The Japanese officials were well aware of the slippery translation, and shortly after the exposition, replaced *bijutsu* with a long explanatory phrase “category of oil painting and sculpted objects that must aid everyday industry.”⁶ In 1875, the term *kōjutsu* 工術, meaning crafts, replaced *bijutsu* to translate the new concept of fine arts being applied to industry in the Japanese official reports of the Exposition.⁷ The Chinese, navigating between newly-coined Japanese kanji neologism and the original Western language terms, interpreted them in the most comprehensive manner at world’s fairs. At the Liège World’s Fair in 1905, the items classified under the category *fine arts* included not only musical instruments and painting, but also sculpture and architecture.⁸ The displayed items under the sculpture category were usually jade carvings. Special listing such as “Original Objects of Art Workmanship” was created in order to accommodate a range of miscellaneous objects such as bronzes, jades, and carved bamboo that could not be comfortably plugged into

⁵ Amagai Yoshinori, “On the Program of Universal Exhibition 1873 in Vienna.” *Nihon dezain gakkai dezain gaku kenkyū*, *Bulletin of JSSD*, 47 (2000): 2-3.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Amagai Yoshinori, “On the Program of Universal Exhibition 1873 in Vienna (2) – An Evaluation of ‘Kōjutsu-habubutsukan-hieki-ron’ as a Historical Material for Japanese Modern Design.” *Nihon dezain gakkai dezain gaku kenkyū*, *Bulletin of JSSD*, 48 (2001): 2-3.

⁸ “美術品 若我國之樂器畫具彫刻物建築物等類皆是。” “Biguo bolanhui diaocha shilu [Report on the Liège Exposition].” *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern Miscellany), 6 (1906): 45-49.

the Western classifications of arts and crafts. The listings were never consistent, however, as lacquerware and jade vases appeared under several different group listings.⁹ The linguistic instability reflects the conceptual confusion China and Japan experienced as they transposed traditional arts and crafts into the exploratory development of industry-based art during the self-strengthening process of the nation-state in East Asia.

The late 19th century ethnographic and commercial interest of Europe and America in China granted Qing Empire two rather successful world's fairs as an official nation-state participant in the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, and then, the world's fair held in Liège, Belgium the year after.¹⁰ As expected, traditional Chinese arts and crafts such as textile, tea culture, and porcelain dominated the Chinese display. Premised upon the display of distinct national characters, the organizers reveled in the exoticism China brought to the international fair. The positive reception gave the Chinese, despite the clear awareness of their own under-developed industry, an illusion that they could claim a competitive niche vis-à-vis other nations with traditional crafts. Complacency, or rather, the fear of losing the international

⁹ *Catalogue of the Collection of Chinese Exhibits at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition*, St. Louis (St. Louis: Shallcross Printers, 1904).

¹⁰ Although individual Chinese craftsmen had participated in world's fairs since the first one in London in 1851, China did not enter world expositions as an official nation-state until the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis. The Qing government was reluctant to participate in earlier expositions until 1873 when the Qing court agreed to partake in the Vienna Exposition. In Vienna, China's exhibits, however, were completely organized by the Englishman Robert Hart (1835-1911), then the head of the Chinese customs, and made little impact on the reception of Chinese arts and crafts. By the early 1900s, the Qing government realized that, in addition to the purely economic significance of these events, diplomatic benefits could also accrue to participants in the world expositions. The display and demand of Chinese-made products was also essential to stimulating domestic industries so as to bolster the international image of China. Despite the financial crisis, Dowager Cixi approved 500,000 taels of silver to spend in preparation for the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair. See Zhao Dachuan, ed., *History of Convention and Exhibition Industry in China*, vol.1 (Hangzhou: Hangzhou chubanshe, 2010).

appeal of its traditional crafts, not only prevented China from updating and reinventing traditional crafts, but also from investing in new areas of production. The covers of the 1904 and 1905 catalogue for St. Louis and Liège featured almost identical designs with twin dragons flanking the title in the middle (figure 2.2, 2.3). The two dragons, mirror image of each other, rise majestically from bottom to top. As the most traditional symbol of China known to the West, their towering bodies bracket the ensemble of Chinese products, symbolic of an insurmountable obstacle that simultaneously protected what China was yet limited what China could become. At Liège, private Chinese participating companies were condemned for displaying stone work, as the Chinese officials feared the comparison with nations traditionally competitive in stone work would embarrass China.¹¹ Soon, however, China would fall out of favor at world's fairs as modern design aesthetics entered the international competition. At the Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition of 1926 in Philadelphia, Chinese tea and silk could no longer compete with Japan, who were better at aestheticizing traditional arts and crafts with modern design sensibility.¹² Recalling the preface of *Chinese Ancient Designs*, Ge Gongzhen's lament of China's current lack of design awareness was driven by the feeling of crisis experienced by Chinese as their products competed unfavorably abroad.

¹¹ “若私商之陳列品則甚爲腐敗。蓋若輩不知賽會爲何事徒知謀利而已...其陳列品則以石物爲大宗與義大利之石像較之誠覺汗顏。” “Biguo bolanhui diaocha shilu.” *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern Miscellany), 6 (1906): 46.

¹² Shanghai Library ed., *China and World Exposition: Historical Records (1851-1940)* (Shanghai: Shanghai kexue jishu wenxian chubanshe, 2002), 90-97.

2.2 Lessons from Paris

Against the background of both success and failure under the self-orientalizing agenda, China's participation at the 1925 International Exposition des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris was particularly noteworthy since it was organized by a generation of officials and artists who had studied in Europe. China was to present a new image of herself. This was evident from the catalogue's cover design created by the French-trained architect Liu Jipiao (Liou Tépéou) 劉既漂 (1901-1992). Instead of the double dragon motif from previous exhibition catalogues at St. Louis and Liège, Liu Jipiao paired the dragon with the image of a mythical bird (figure 2.4). The intertwined bodies wind and wrap around each other as they rise to form a circle around the title plate. The interlacing of the dragon's scales and the bird's feathers creates a rich visual drama kept in balance by the symmetry of their winding bodies on either side of the title roundel. Liu Jipiao replaced the patriarchal double dragon at St. Louis and Liège with a coupling image of the dragon and the bird with the nation's name "Republic of China" (*zhonghua minguo* 中華民國) appearing at the center of the cover where the two animals conjoin. The animals' gyrating, serpentine bodies generate a visual energy comparable to that of the newborn vitality brought forth by the new Republic. The fiery red color further intensifies the liveliness of the design. Using some of the most symbolic imagery of Chinese culture, Liu Jipiao re-invented the dragon icon by eliminating its association with the emperor, the dynasty, and re-establishing the mythical dimension of the dragon. The icon of the bird, seen in the mythical context, fluctuates between a phoenix and the vermillion bird, or *zhuque*, guardian animal of the south. Meanwhile, the treatment of the bird evokes Art Nouveau's emblematic image of the peacock rather than the traditional Chinese representation of either the phoenix or

the vermillion bird (figure 2.5). Art Nouveau's organic and whiplash energy served Liu Jipiao well in restoring the life-generating, cosmological matrix of the otherwise sterile icons.

The cosmological energy rendered in the Art Nouveau vocabulary was transposed to the exhibition space where the same dragon-bird pair embellishes the entrance of the Chinese display (figure 2.6). The two animals are created as bas-reliefs crouching over the arch above the entrance. A series of chunky rectangles resembling stylized Art Deco Chinese characters decorates the entrance. The opposing wall features a moon and sun design, mirroring the cosmological order established by the dragon-female-bird interaction (figure 2.7, 2.8). A highly stylized cloud motif interspersed with white dots covers the entire wall surface of the space. Distinctively more abstract and less schematized than the cloud pattern on the cover of the 1905 Liège catalogue, these nebulous bodies defy a symmetrical arrangement—a predominant convention of decorative ornament in China— and ascend from the bottom to top, eventually forming a horizontal register below the ceiling. The spongy cloud swirls are kept in balance and contrast with the hard-edged patterns alternating between rectangles and triangles that decorate the molding between the walls and the ceiling.

Not surprisingly, the audience in Paris was blind to Liu Jipiao's painstaking effort to update Chinese decorative design without losing its symbolic function. "The Chinese Section of the exhibition was in many ways a 'non-event,' which struck no resonances at the time and left no visible effects behind it."¹³ For them, the cosmological experience founded on the adaptation of Chinese ancient design and Art Nouveau vocabulary produced a strange folkishness that

¹³ Craig Clunas, "Chinese Art and Chinese Artists in France, 1924-1925," 100-106. *Arts Asiatiques*, 44 (1989): 100.

could have, perhaps, enchanted them back at the 1900 Exposition Universelle where Art Nouveau was the fashionable decorative language. What was desired in 1925 was no longer the oblique, whiplash energy, but what was later referred to as the “art déco” style, a much more sober and symmetrical aesthetic that hinged upon the union of traditional crafts and the use of new materials. The French designer Edgar Brandt’s elevator panel *Les Cicognes d’Alsace*, for example, epitomized the desire (figure 2.9). Engaged in similar motifs as Liu Jipiao, the birds (storks) and the cloud pattern, Brandt’s design, however, differs from Liu’s in its purity of form and a certain austerity created by geometric patterns. The fundamental paradox is that the desire for pure form was coupled with an almost baroque exuberance, marked by the panel’s luscious shimmer and rich texture. Paris delighted in Brandt’s orchestration of old forms with new material, a combination of lacquer, wood, iron, and bronze in this example, a luxurious object that utilizes geometric patterns without compromising dramatic movement. Brandt’s pursuit of pure form and new materiality was mild, digestible, and relative. Paris was rather intimidated by the kind of push for pure form that exceeded what was accepted within the cultural accumulation of the European West. Berating the constructivist USSR pavilion as a “stylization of the guillotine,” with a few exceptions, critics in Paris found it impossible to explain away the formal innovation of the menacing structure without transgressing a comfortable European history of art (figure 2.10).¹⁴

¹⁴ Emmanuel Bréon, *L’Exposition des Arts Décoratifs 1925 Naissance d’un Style* (Paris: Scérén-CNDP, 2007), 23. Designed by Konstantin Melnikov, the USSR pavilion rests on two triangular space connected by an austere staircase over which a series of intersecting diagonal panels. The red and white paint and the grid façade structure further articulate its extreme visual clarity of the exterior and transparency of the interior.

Brandt's tendency to unite geometric patterns with organic references is comparable to Liu Jipiao's re-creation of conventional icons using design. Although descriptive characterization such as abstraction, stylization, and dynamism are applicable to both, these terms cast a very different scenario in China from the European West. Brandt's baroque backlash internalized a comforting connection between crafts' past and present. As Catherine A. Jones argues that despite art objects are ideologically constructed as autonomous, their meanings, however, once inserted into world's fairs were ultimately determined by the world pictures in which artworks were situated.¹⁵ Having been exposed to the kind of *Chinese-ness*, such that were displayed at St. Louis and Liège for example, the European audience did not possess the cultural foundation that would allow the recognition of Liu Jipiao's achievement. Ironically, Art Nouveau's own indebtedness to East Asian art and design turned into a disadvantage to China's "catching up" with Europe.

At world's fairs, different nations were expected to speak the same language, but speak of their difference.¹⁶ The curvilinear rendering of the mythical animals, undulating neck and excessive use of curls and circles formed by its sweeping feathers appeared, for the Parisian audience, anachronistically Art Nouveau that had been the leading style 25 years ago at the 1900 Exposition Universelle. The 1925 expo was dominated by a new international style of decorative arts characterized by the simplification of form. Distinct cultural manifestation and inspiration are still visible, but only in the service of demonstrating how cultural differences

¹⁵ Catherine A. Jones, "Biennial Culture: A Longer History," in Elena Filipovic, Marieke Van Hal, and Solveig Øvstebø, eds., *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall, 2010), 70.

¹⁶ I am indebted to Professor Catherine Jones for her insights on the discussion of world's fairs.

could be eventually subsumed under the industrialization of arts. The French jewelry artists Georges Fouquet and Jean Fouquet, for example, created jewelries inspired by “l’art nègre,” “the Far East,” or art of the “berber’s.”¹⁷ These jewelries exemplified the ideal of *l’art décoratif*, the principle of which was to eliminate specific cultural and historical references through an international language of geometry and simplicity (figure 2.11). In contrast to the dictate of the new Art Deco style, the design of the Chinese section uncomfortably stood between the by now ill-favored *fin-de-siècle* stylization and traditional mystical Chinese iconography. The French organizers were disappointed by China’s display and lamented that the country, “is trapped in its glorious past, and still has not found new methods to cope with the many changes currently taking place.”¹⁸

There could not have been a greater contrast to the Chinese Section than the adjacent USSR Section (separate from the USSR pavilion) where drawings of the constructivist and mostly unrealizable projects including the mile high monument to the Third International by Tatlin were exhibited.¹⁹ Needless to say, it was a time when the avant-garde challenged what was acceptable in the visual arts by dismantling painting’s reigning position as epitome of the visual arts. The elitist practice of painting was not attacked in China as it was in Europe and the USSR. I share Leo Lee’s view in thinking that in the European West, the avant-garde, emerging

¹⁷ Emmanuel Bréon, 39.

¹⁸ *Encyclopédie des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes au XXème Siècle: twelve volumes documenting the Paris exhibition of 1925*, vol. VI, tissu et papier, classe 13, art et industrie des textiles, section étrangères (New York: Garland, 1977), 49.

¹⁹ Frank Scarlett and Marjorie Townley, *Arts Décoratifs 1925: A Personal Recollection of the Paris Exhibition* (London: Academy Editions; New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1975), 79. See also in the second volume of the official catalogue for the description of the U.S.S.R section, 78.

from romantic beginnings, inclined toward radical anti-bourgeois attitudes. In China, however, no such attitude of aesthetic hostility can be found because there was no tangible mass of bourgeoisie to shock. The concept of the “bourgeois” itself was just being introduced by Chinese writers on the left in a crude Marxist framework. Unlike European modernists, the Chinese intellectuals were yet to comprehend the full impact of the industrial revolution. In China, modernity may have been a literary fashion, an ideal, but it was not a fully verifiable, objective reality.²⁰ For these reasons, while Chinese artists abroad might be attracted to the visual power of politically motivated works of art, the radical anti-bourgeois tendencies therein were often undetected.

2.3 *The Weight of Painting*²¹

The Paris exposition was premised upon re-establishing France’s dominant role in decorative and industrial arts and left a profound impact on the arts of many places in the world. It marked the so-called Art Déco style as the new paradigm for international decorative arts. Although it served to reinstate France as the center of the arts—a leading role that it had not occupied since the great age of the *beaux-arts* in the late 19th century—the moving away from fine arts and increased investment in decorative arts were shared by other European countries,

²⁰ Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 146-7.

²¹ For the influence of the French *beaux-arts* academy on modern architecture, see Reyner Banham, *Theory and Design in the First Machine Age* (New York: Praeger, 1960), 15. Modernist architects criticized the academic for not nurturing aesthetic science, but also make use of a number of aesthetic concepts that resemble those of French academic origin. Many academic ideas accepted by architects came not from the architectural side of *beaux-arts* instruction, but from the painterly.

the United States, and the Soviet Union. The deep reverence for painting among Chinese theorists and artists placed China in a very unfavorable position in this new international design context despite China's traditional stronghold in modular design, a strength that had ironically fertilized design in Europe.

The obvious reason for China's failed effort in Paris was lack of government support. Unlike the 1904 World Expo in St. Louis, for which the Qing government provided sufficient financial backing, the Republican government neither paid much attention nor gave financial support to the 1925 Exposition. Consisting of eight stands and two vestibules on the first floor of Le Grand Palais, it was expediently put together by the Chinese Artists Association in France, essentially a group of Chinese artists already living in Europe at the time, such as the painter Lin Fengmian 林風眠 (1900-1991) and the architect Liu Jipiao. Many of the exhibited ceramics were gathered from Chinese shops in Paris. Yet, as Clunas observes, this "non-event" was nevertheless an event rich in significance for an understanding of modern China's cultural dilemmas.²²

One of these dilemmas was precisely how design had been conceptualized vis-à-vis painting in China during the decade leading up to the 1925 Paris Expo. Unlike in Europe, where new forms of artistic innovation were often predicated upon challenging painting's paramount status over other forms of mediums (an anxiety that, ironically, reinforces painting's supremacy), in East Asia, painting always occupied a venerable position and continued to do so in the modern period. Chinese artists who championed the new concept of design all

²² Clunas, 100.

approached design from a painter's vantage point. With the institutionalization of Western-style painting in China, as discussed below, the first generation practitioners of oil painting assumed a great deal of power and prestige, and found themselves establishing discourses in various fields in China. The Chinese painters who formally studied abroad, such as Li Shutong 李叔同 (1880-1942) in Japan (further elaborated below), and Lin Fengmian in France, gathered the double prestige of having studied abroad and being trained in Western-style painting.

The organizing authorities of the Paris exposition embraced a very comprehensive list of all forms of art in all known materials, *excluding* only pictures or statues not conforming strictly to a decorative whole.²³ In contrast to this variety, the Chinese section, featured four paintings by Lin Fengmian as the modern innovation of China's decorative arts. Aside from the obvious reason of expediency, the particular style of Lin's paintings along with the other objects exhibited in Paris indicate the persistent self-orientalization that China chose to pursue while presenting its arts in foreign contexts.²⁴ More importantly, it reveals painting's dominance in the Chinese agenda to modernize its art. One of Lin Fengmian's paintings entitled *Symphonie Orientale* depicts the classic subject of the gibbon reaching for the reflection of the moon on the surface of water (figure 2.12). Survived only in a black and white reproduction, it is difficult to make out the details of the painting. Yet, the unmistakable subject matter and the atmospheric effect created by using large areas of unpainted space bear strong resemblance to the

²³ Frank Scarlett and Marjorie Townley, 9.

²⁴ For a discussion on a similar self-orientalizing strategies the artist Xu Beihong adopted while curating the Chinese art exhibition in Paris, see Eugene Y. Wang, "Sketch Conceptualism as Modernist Contingency" in Maxwell Hearn and Judith Smith, eds., *Chinese Art: Modern Expressions* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001), 102-161.

romanticist ink painting style championed by the Lingnan painters Gao Jianfu 高劍父 (1879-1951) and Gao Qifeng 高奇峰 (1889-1933), whose style was in turn influenced by Japanese painters of the later Kyoto school such as Takeuchi Seihō (1864-1942) and Yamamoto Shunkyo (1871-1933) (figure 2.13).²⁵ As Croizier convincingly argues, Chinese painters studying in Japan were attracted to Western realism, as translated by Japanese artists into ink painting, and combined it with a strong emotional expressionism that can be called romanticism.²⁶

Although this style did not derive from Lin Fengmian's particular situation since he never studied in Japan, it was used to bear upon the current cultural circumstances in Paris. The de-emphasis on line and reliance on broad ink washes to render the gibbon and the branches produced a misty and lyrical effect very familiar to the East Asian ink painting tradition. This kind of haze painting was further essentialized in the early 20th century as an expression of a disembodied spirituality in East Asia and the ideal quality of an Asian modernity-in-the-making.²⁷ The other three paintings by Lin Fengmian exhibited in Paris, with the respective titles of *Méditation des Grands Ducs*, *Vouloir Vivre*, and *Oiseaux Déplorant Leur Triste Destinée* demonstrate similar spiritual allusions and romanticism (figure 2.14-16). In stylistic terms, they all display a common poetic sensibility through the virtuosic use of ink washes. The overtly romantic titling also reflected a strong desire to embed cultural references and symbolism in these paintings. The unrelenting quest for meaning invested in painting represented by Lin

²⁵ Ralph C. Croizier, *Art and Revolution in Modern China: The Lingnan School of Painting, 1906-1951* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 24-59.

²⁶ Ibid., 56.

²⁷ Eugene Y. Wang, "Art: A China/India Comparison" forthcoming.

Fengmian's works could not have been more distant from the Paris Expo's guiding principle that all exhibits should fulfill a practical need and express modern aspirations.

Although Chinese art theorists and artists had been advocating for design and for the application of the arts more broadly for over a decade by 1925, the dominance of painting and the persistent drive to attach meaning to it impeded design from transcending attributes associated with painting. Design continued to be conceived as closely tied to painting. The lack of real contact between discursive theory and practice explains China's unimpressive presentation in Paris in 1925.

Outside the immediate institutional context, however, design had a large popular appeal. Graphic works created to illustrate or decorate newspapers and magazines were especially popular. While Chinese painters experienced difficulty in liberating painting from symbolism in the early 1920s, it seemed easier to dispense with excessive cultural references in design. In 1928, the painter Feng Zikai made the remark that "painting does not need to have meanings" while commenting on Tao Yuanqing's work.²⁸ Part of Feng Zikai's realization has to do with how design mediated between painting and other forms of visual representation in the early 1920s. In the early to mid-20's, the practice of design served to unburden painting, Chinese and Western styles alike, from traditional symbolism.

²⁸ Zhao Jingshen, "Ai Mr. Tao Yuanqing [Mourning Mr. Tao Yuanqing]." *Yiban*, 9, 1-4 (1929): 262-264.

2.4 The Beginning: All-purpose Design

In 1920, the educator, musician, and painter Wu Mengfei 吳夢非 (1893-1979) published a series of essays with the important statement that design was a new, imported field that differed from painting. “In China,” he writes, “there have been only terms such as *moyang* (模樣) and *huawen* (花紋) [decorative pattern]. The term *tu'an* was new. It was translated from Western languages, ‘design’ in English, by the Japanese [using Chinese characters] and subsequently imported to China. The term, unwittingly, began to be used in the field of education.”²⁹ The novelty of the term *tu'an* required Wu to define it against the more commonly taught subject *huihua* 繪畫 (painting). Design was not, however, understood vis-à-vis painting and drawing when the concept first came to China via Japan. Design was first purported to be a method for industrialization. The term *design* or *tu'an* did not appear in the discourse until the late 1910s.

In the late Qing period, the term *gongyi* 工藝, meaning craft art or industrial art, was used to denote the coming together of industry and aesthetics or arts and sciences. The term *gongyi*, also a new loan word from Japan, indicated an indispensable artistic intervention for a nation to develop its *shiye* 實業, a term encompassing industry, agriculture, medicine and other fields essential to nation-building.

During the modern period, many Japanese neologisms used decontextualized Chinese characters to appropriate new concepts from the West. These terms were then re-imported to China, where they usually took on a double meaning for the Chinese. Along with the

²⁹ Wu Mengfei, “Tu'an jianghua [Lectures on tu'an].” *Meiyu* (Aesthetic Education), 3 (1920): 85-87.

neologisms, China followed Japan in its recognition and establishment of industrial arts. In Japan, the concept of industrial arts in the Meiji period (1868-1912) emerged from the model of the world's expositions. As a process through which to digest and domesticate the statecraft-based artistic activities, Japan began to hold its own nation-wide expositions first in 1877 and then again in 1881.³⁰ In an effort modeled upon Japan's experimentation with industrial arts, China began to create its own domestic and international exposition culture.

On June 5, 1910, China's first nation-wide exhibition opened in Nanjing. Emulating the examples of the world's fairs, the Nanyang Fair showcased China's social and industrial achievement since the Yangwu Movement (also known as Tongguang New Policy), which began in the 1860s with the initiation of industrialization and westernization. Deeply threatened by the industrial prowess of the imperial states in the West, the Qing government realized the necessity to learn from the West and Japan in order to regain its sovereignty in the world through a well-developed *shiyè*. To develop *shiyè* became the guiding principle in all spheres of production from the late Qing to the early Republican period.

In an early effort to link industry and the arts in China, the aforementioned Lingnan School ink painters Gao Jianfu and Gao Qifeng even began to hold small-scale expositions in 1907 in Guangzhou to showcase ceramics made by themselves. Although the works they exhibited did not involve actual renewed industrial process, they nonetheless served to reinforce the stakes of artistic creations for China's state-building project and to anticipate a

³⁰ Amagai Yoshinori, *Ōyō bijutsu shisō dōnyū no rekishi: uinhaku sandō yori ishō jōrei seitei made* [The Introductory History of the Concept of Applied Arts: from the Participation of the Vienna Expo to the Ishō Regulation] (Kyoto: Shibunkaku Shuppan, 2010), 4.

nation-wide exposition culture. “If China does not develop its *shiye*,” Gao Jianfu complains, “the loss of economic rights to foreigners will not stop... fortunately heaven does not abandon China, people will gradually become more intelligent and attendant to *shiye*. This exposition, though far from being able to promote *gongyi* [crafts] broadly, serves as an embryo [to a broader promotion of *gongyi*].”³¹

Like the world’s fairs, the Nanyang Fair aimed to create a competitive culture among provinces and sectors as a means to encourage innovation and to increase productivity. Thirty-four pavilions were arranged by theme and region. The mission to united industry and arts was at the center of the fair. The fair witnessed a huge push in the thematic and regional pavilions for the cultivation of industrial arts under the term *gongyi*. For example, the pavilion, originally designed to showcase the development of the transportation system, was converted into a second *gongyi* pavilion due to the latter’s popularity among the visitors. It was unclear, however, what the term *gongyi* actually entailed at the time. The seven sections in the *gongyi* pavilion are:

1. weaving and dying industry
2. mining and metallurgy
3. ceramics
4. construction and architecture
5. weaving and dying part two
6. manufacturing
7. chemistry

³¹ “中國實業一日不興, 漏卮一日不塞, 漏卮不塞, 則國日益瘠。民日益貧, 恐欲求今日之中國, 亦不可得也。幸天不絕漢, 民智日開, 漸知趨重于實業。博覽會之設, 雖未達廣興工藝一級, 而胚胎已朕于此矣。” Quoted from Li Weiming, “Gao Jianfu liuxue riben kao [Studies on Gao Jiangfu’s time in Japan].” *Duoyun*, 44 (1995): 69-87.

In addition to the stand-alone *gongyi* pavilion, the *meishu* pavilion, or the fine arts pavilion, also contained a *gongyi* section in which similar ceramics and lacquerware were displayed.³² The fine arts pavilion was divided into four sections: crafts, casting and sculpting, handicrafts, and carving. It was unclear how the stand-alone crafts pavilion was different from the fine arts pavilion. This arbitrary sectioning reflects the murky boundaries between crafts and fine arts. One can only surmise that crafts not traditionally practiced in China, such as glassware and leather manufacturing, were part of the crafts pavilion whereas those with a long tradition in China, for example, embroidery and fan-decoration, belonged to the fine arts pavilion. By the same token, figurines made of ceramic were displayed in the fine arts pavilion, but those made of wax were part of the crafts pavilion.

Even more confusing, the fine arts pavilion also exhibited, along with embroidery and porcelain, paintings, including one landscape scroll by the 17th-century painter and arbiter of taste Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636). A few oil paintings also found their way into the fine arts pavilion under the *shougong* (handicrafts) sub-section; these were two oil paintings by the female painter Wu Weiqiao 吳維翹, two water-oil-lacquer paintings by Zhang Yuguang 張聿光, and an oil painting by another female painter Su Ben 蘇本. Since there was not a separate section for painting, all the exhibited ink paintings were listed under the crafts section, and the oil paintings under the handicrafts section inside the fine arts pavilion.

The term *gong-yi*, combining the first character in *gong-ye* (industry) and the first character in *yi-shu* (arts), was conveniently applied to encompass a great variety of crafts, some

³² Su Keqin, *Nanyan quanyehui tushuo* [Illustrational History of the Nanyang Fair] (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaotong daxue chubanshe, 2010).

traditionally practiced in China and others imported from the West. In the early 1900s, oil painting, along with drawing and diagramming, which required precision tools, were regarded more as crafts facilitating industry rather than fine arts promoting self-cultivation like traditional literati painting. Around 1910, as reflected by the miscellaneous classification at the Nanyang Fair, oil painting and drawing were considered in and of themselves a kind of industrial art by virtue of their mechanical imperatives. In a brilliant essay on the relationship between industry and art at the Nanyang Fair, Xie Yijing argues that the *gong* in *gong-yi*, if understood as skilled labor involving the use of the hand would obviously include categories such as painting, drawing, calligraphy, and embroidery. She also observes that although the same kind of objects were spread across many pavilions, the *gongyi* (crafts) pavilion stressed the *utility* of items on display, i.e. how drawings and paintings can serve mechanical purposes. In the *meishu* (fine arts) pavilion, the same items were praised, instead, for their decorative value.³³

The precarious definition of *gongyi* and *meishu* reflects the confusion caused by applying loan words introduced from Japan to existing categories of artistic production in China. The categorical distinction created by the imported neologisms was hardly stable. By the late 1910s, to simplify the classification, *gongyi* and *meishu* were merged into a single term *gongyimeishu* (sometimes in the reverse order as *meishugongyi*). As the European concept of fine arts, or *meishu* in Chinese, increasingly permeated Chinese society, *gongyimeishu* was subsumed under the new

³³ Xie Yijing, "Gong yu mei – Nanyang quanye hui meishu gainian fanyi de fenlei wenti [Craft and beauty: the categorical problem of the translations of fine arts concept at the Nanyang Fair]." *Yiyi fenzi*, 7/94.04 (2005): 19-34.

taxonomy of fine arts that largely entailed the practice of painting, sculpture, architecture, and sometimes, calligraphy in China in the 1920s.³⁴

2.5 Design and the Aesthetic Education

At the Nanyang Fair, more revealing than the crafts and fine arts pavilions of the condition of industrial arts were the education pavilion and the provincial pavilions in which one finds attempts to unify art and industry more organically. The Nanyang Fair offered the first nationwide opportunity to showcase the fruits of the new educational system implemented since the 1890s.³⁵ Based upon the Japanese educational system, two imperial edicts issued in 1902 and 1904 highlighted the requirement to include *tuhua* 圖畫 (drawing and painting) and *shougong* 手工 (handicrafts) curriculum in all levels of education.³⁶ In addition to the usual three-tier education system from primary school to university and the specialized technical schools and girls' schools, a special type of school called the teachers' school or normal school was particularly instrumental to the development of industrial art and later design in China (part of that tradition is still reflected in the normal universities found in almost every city in China today). The civil examination, the traditional path to government in China, was not abolished

³⁴ Chen Ruilin, *20 shiji zhongguo meishu jiaoyu lishi yanjiu* (Fine Art Education in 20th-century China: a Historical Perspective) (Beijing: Qinghua daxue chubanshe, 2006), 116.

³⁵ For a discussion on early art education in China, see Mayching Kao, "Reforms in Education and the Beginning of the Western-Style Painting Movement in China," in Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, eds., *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-century China* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1998), 146-161. Also see Tian Jun, *The Initial Development of China's Artistic Design Education: Study on Art and Craft Education over the Republic of China* (M.A. Thesis, Tsinghua University, 2004).

³⁶ Chen Ruilin, 38. For chronicles of education edits and policies, see Chen Xuexun, *Zhongguo jindai jiaoyu dajishi* [Chronicles of Modern Education in China] (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1981).

until 1905, but the new educational system required teachers who were capable of teaching the newly introduced subjects. To close the shortage of teachers, the schools hired Japanese teachers to teach, with particular focus on the subjects of natural sciences, drawing, painting, and handicrafts.

The Nanjing Liangjiang Normal School (originally known as the Nanjing Sanjiang Normal School) was the earliest of this type of teacher's schools. In 1908, among the total of ten Japanese teachers hired at the school, half of them taught the subject of *tuhua* and *shougong*.³⁷ Although slightly varied in different levels of class offerings, *tuhua* usually entails *zizai-hua* (free-hand drawing) and *yongqi-hua* (drawing using measuring tools). The *shougong* subject contains bamboo work, carpentry, and metallurgy.³⁸ Many graduates went on to study in Japan and free-hand drawing was part of the entrance exam for Higher Engineering Schools in Japan.³⁹ Although the term *tu'an*, which eventually was used as the Chinese translation for the English word *design*, did not appear as a separate subject of studies at the school, the emphasis on the utility of drawing and painting laid the foundation for the next generation of educators to advocate for the social and economic necessity of design.

³⁷ Su Yunfeng, *San (Liang) jiang shifan xuetang: Nanjing daxue de qianshen, 1903-1911* [San (liang) jiang Normal School: the Predecessor of Nanjing University, 1903-1911], (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2002), 33.

³⁸ Su Yunfeng, appendix 1.

³⁹ Douglas Reynolds, *China, 1898-1912: the Xinzhen Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, 1993), 97-98.

Design was first offered as an independent subject at the Zhejiang Second Normal School between 1912 and 1915.⁴⁰ To replicate the Japanese system, the school created a specialized field for drawing, painting, and handicrafts in 1912. The following year, the upper school (for the training of high school teachers) was combined with Beijing Higher Normal School. The drawing, painting, and handicrafts department was part of the upper school but due to its heavy reliance on Japanese teachers, the department remained on the Hangzhou campus and became the first ad-hoc specialized school to train artists. This unique art department only produced one class of graduates and was closed in 1915 as more specialized private art schools began to emerge in Shanghai. The department, however short-lived, gathered figures such as Li Shutong, Lu Xun, and Xia Mianzun, and produced influential theorists and artists including Pan Tianshou, Feng Zikai, and Wu Mengfei. It was no coincidence that among these figures were the first practitioners of design, most notably Lu Xun and Li Shutong. Wu Mengfei, the first theorist and pedagogue of design in China, together with Feng Zikai founded the Shanghai Normal Art School where Tao Yuanqing studied painting in the early 1920s. The 1910s and 1920s also marked a gradual reaction against the extreme emphasis on the use value of the arts of the previous decades. The Zhejiang Second Normal School embraced a humanistic teaching approach that trained students in all realms of the arts including painting, drawing, handicrafts, design, and music. This approach exemplifies practices that would come to dominate the Chinese educational system in the next two decades.

⁴⁰ Wu Mengfei, “Wusi’ yundong qianhou de meishu jiaoyu huiyi pianduan [Fragmented recollection of the art education around the time of May Fourth Movement].” *Meishu yanjiu*, 3 (1959): 42-46.

The Nanyang Fair marks the peak of the self-strengthening project through industry. After 1910, however, the governing educational philosophy that every subject offered must be in the service of industry could no longer apply to the fast-shifting landscape in the arts along with other subjects in the humanities. The return from abroad of many Chinese students who studied humanities paved the way for a shifted conceptualization of the union of industry and art. Prior to the founding of the new Republic in 1911, many regions in China had already begun reforming their educational systems after models learned from Japan. After 1911, the reforms were implemented to a more rigorous national degree and were characterized by the celebrated aesthetic education proposed by Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1866-1940).

In 1912, Cai Yuanpei was appointed the first minister of education and then in 1917 the chancellor of Peking University. He studied philosophy, psychology, and art history in Leipzig University in Germany and travelled extensively to France from 1908 to 1911. After the founding of Republican China, the tentative regulation of common education had similar requirements for middle school's drawing and painting course, but their overall goal had shifted from being subservient to industry to the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility. The instructor's manual for elementary school teachers clearly required such cultivation: "the key to painting and drawing is to observe objects carefully, being able to draw free-hand as well as practicing *yijiang* [alternative translation of *design* discussed below] and cultivating aesthetic sensibility."⁴¹ Following Cai Yuanpei's appeal, the educational system shifted from the

⁴¹ "中學教則: 圖畫要旨, 在使詳審物體, 能自由繪畫, 兼練習意匠, 涵養美感。" Quoted from Chen Ruilin, 117.

industry-oriented curricula of the previous decades to a program of self-cultivation premised upon aesthetics.

Aesthetic education needed an important justification, namely its utility to larger economy and society. The self-cultivation discourse exemplified by the literati tradition was altogether too familiar for the Chinese modern thinkers. Design, as a subject, provided the perfect bridge between utilitarianism and aestheticism. The perceived practicality of design justified the implementation of aesthetic education. Returning the favor, under the umbrella of the aesthetic education, design could be practiced without excessive theoretical justification. Design became a common subject in secondary education by the mid-1920s and was mobilized to showcase the achievement of aesthetic education in secondary schools (figure 2.17). As seen on the cover of a design collection published by the Beijing First Public Secondary Girl School, the English word design had by 1925 become a common parlance.

2.6 Design versus Painting

The educators advocating for aesthetic education saw the potential of utilizing the widespread drawing-painting-handicrafts curricula structure to promote design as a separate field that had more affinity to painting than industry. This was also a period during which painting itself was becoming increasingly institutionalized following Japan's adaptation of the French *beaux-arts* model. The Chinese word for aesthetic education, *mei-yu* shares the same *mei* (beautiful) character with the Chinese translation for *beaux-arts*, *mei-shu*. In the Chinese mind, therefore, the notion of aesthetic education linguistically gave priority to painting over other forms of art.

Under Cai Yuanpei's supervision, the first public art school in the country, the Beijing Fine Arts School was established on April 15, 1918. The school modeled itself after the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (Tokyo Bijutsu Gakkō), but initially only offered two departments: painting and design. In the opening address at the school, Cai Yuanpei highlighted the relationship between the two mediums. "Design," he claims, "came before painting. Design first began with geometric shapes, followed by animal and vegetal shapes, and then gradually developed into painting...But when painting was developed, design still developed in parallel with it."⁴² Despite the influence of evolutionary theory in Cai Yuanpei's conception of design, to deem design as an essential part of aesthetic education allowed many artists to practice design with strong theoretical and institutional support. In 1919, the school was recognized as an institute for higher education by the Republican government and offered three subjects of study: Chinese painting, Western-Style painting, and design.⁴³

Between the industry-based curricula of the late Qing period and the proper institutionalization of design in 1918, many private art schools were opened and served as intermediaries to informally train students in design. The art educator Zhou Xiang 周湘 (1871-1933), for instance, opened several special art schools in Shanghai and offered, in addition to Western-style painting classes, practical courses such as stage design, pencil drawing, and

⁴² “圖畫之中，圖案先起，而繪畫繼之。圖案之中，又先有幾何形體，次有動物，次有植物，其後遂發展而為繪畫...惟繪畫發達以後，圖案仍與為平行之發展。” Cai Yuanpei, “Opening address at the National Beijing Art Academy” quoted from *Cai Yuanpei meixue wenxuan* [Selected Writings of Cai Yuanpei on Aesthetics] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1983), 77. Originally published in *Beijing daxue rikan* [Peking University Daily], April 18, 1918.

⁴³ Pan Yaolang, *Zhongguo jinxindai meishu jiaoyushi* (Chinese Art Education Encyclopedia: Fine Arts Series) (Hangzhou: Zhongguo meishu xueyuan chubanshe, 2002), 27.

woodblock print. The popular commercial artist Ding Song and Zhang Yuguang both studied under Zhou Xiang in Shanghai before they became designers for advertisement.

The school likewise trained ambitious artists who went on to establish more specialized art schools in Shanghai. The most well-known is the Shanghai Art School founded in 1912 by Liu Haisu, Wu Shiguang, Ding Song, Zhang Yuguang, and Wang Yachen 汪亞塵 (1894-1983). During the first decade of its establishment, Shanghai Art School trained many artists who worked in commercial design. The school was particularly known for its use of nude female models in figure drawing classes in the early 1920s (discussed in Chapter 1). Prior to the 1920s, however, the school was still using the traditional copying method (*linmo*) to teach oil painting.⁴⁴ The school did not offer design courses until 1920 under the Japanese-style institutionalization. It was around the same time, emboldened by the philosophy of aesthetic education, that many artists began to disapprove of the copying method, seeing it as a conceptual barrier to the development of the more creative field of design.

In 1919, it was none other than Wu Mengfei, graduate of the Zhejiang Second Normal School (the first to offer design courses) who published an essay entitled “Guidelines for Future Painting and Drawing Education in China” in which he called for abolishing the copying method and replacing it with design as the new pedagogical paradigm. The three proposed guiding principles were: to promote Chinese-made goods, to abolish copying painting at secondary schools, and to advocate design as the focus of painting and drawing education. Wu blames the copying method for creating dependence on established models of painting and

⁴⁴ Chen Ruilin, 78.

discouraging free expression. In its place, he prescribes *xiesheng* (sketching from life) and the practice of *yijiang* (its meaning discussed below)) as the new methods to train artists who would become capable of improving the decorative qualities of Chinese-made crafts.⁴⁵

The new guiding methodologies introduced by Wu Mengfei, *xiesheng* and *yijiang*, dominated the discourse on art education in the 1910s and 1920s. The best way to understand the history of design is to understand its relationship to high art practices in the Republican era. Here, *xiesheng*, or sketching from life, understood as the foundation for the high art practice of painting, and *yijiang* as the method to transform nature into design, were proposed as refreshing alternatives to the much hated copying method that had dominated Chinese art since at least the Song dynasty. *Xiesheng*, literally meaning “to depict life” was a recurring aesthetic term belonging to a traditional vocabulary familiar to East Asian aesthetic theory.⁴⁶

Xiesheng was also a term coined by the Japanese in the Meiji period to translate the Western practice of *en plein-air*, or sketching from nature. When it was first introduced to the art curricula in the early 1910s, it was understood as a scientific, observational skill through which to depict the visible world. By 1920, sketching from life was still commonly understood as the practice to depict naturalistically what was in front of the eye by most Chinese art theorists and practitioners. It typically consisted of sketching from nature, sketching from figure, and sketching from plaster casts. However, this objectivity of sketching from life was quickly

⁴⁵ Wu Mengfei, “Wuguo jinhou tuhua jiaoyu zhi fangzhen [Guiding principles for our country’s future education in painting and drawing].” *Jiaoyu yu zhiye*, 14 (1919): 1-4.

⁴⁶ The term *xiesheng* presupposed other similar terms such as *xieyi* which reaches all the way back to the Song dynasty, and *xieshi*, a coinage that was used to depict the quality of oil paintings by missionaries in the Qing court.

debated a year later as an effort to embed the concept more comfortably into the existing Chinese painting traditions. It was then interpreted as “depicting at once the exteriority of objects and the interiority of the artist.”⁴⁷

Despite the overrated objectivity Wu Mengfei saw in *xiesheng*, its purported “correctness” created an interesting set-up against which design was defined and understood. In a series of essays on design Wu Mengfei published in 1920, he offered substantial theories and methods for making visually appealing design. He continued to insist on design’s use value for industry, but no longer as a sub-field of industry. One has to understand and conceptualize design with respect to painting. He claims that “although painting and design are the same type of art, their difference is diametrical...to study the design of a chair, one needs to be creative; to study the *xiesheng* (sketching from life) of a chair, one has to be observational.”⁴⁸ According to him, one evaluates a drawing of a chair by whether it is a *correct* representation of the real object; a good design, by contrast, is characterized by the taste for beauty.

Although design operates on different principles than sketching from life, to sketch from life was nonetheless considered as the prerequisite for design. “Only after one is cultivated in sketching from life could he have the mind to apply it and the ingenuity to renew it.”⁴⁹ Wu Mengfei was against recycling traditions from the past, such as the patterns that decorate textiles, in the same way that he rejected copying master paintings. New design, for Wu, still

⁴⁷ Tang Juan, “Xiesheng de yiyi [Meaning of sketching from life].” *Meishu* (Shanghai), 3:2 (1922): 73-81.

⁴⁸ “繪畫和圖案雖然是同一種美術，但是他的區別恰恰立於反對的地位...研究椅子的圖案要有創造的天才；研究椅子寫生要有觀察的能力。” Wu Mengfei, “Tu’an jianghua [Lectures on design].” *Meiyu* (Aesthetic Education), 3 (1920): 85-87.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

required a referent in the real world. A given object should be first sketched, then simplified, and ultimately reorganized into new design with the technique he termed *yijiang*.

Previous examples have demonstrated the decisive role terminologies and neologisms played in domesticating newly imported concepts in China. The profuse use of the term *yijiang* is likewise very characteristic of the design discourse around 1920. The term *yijiang*, literally meaning “conception craftsman,” is at once a neologism imported from Japan and a classical Chinese term. The modern use of the term *yijiang* can be traced to the 1904 imperial education edict, which ordered a thorough implementation of the Japanese education system and highlighted the importance of the painting, drawing, and handicraft curricula.⁵⁰ It listed specific requirement for the painting and drawing curriculum at every level of education. For example, in middle schools, “all students studying painting should engage with real objects, models, and illustration templates. In order to practice *yijiang*, they should learn free-hand drawing while simultaneously paying attention to the importance of drawing using measuring tools in preparation for making maps and diagrams for engineering and other foundations of industrial and commercial enterprises.” It is the first official mentioning of the new term *yijiang* that, by this time, had been coined in Japan and re-imported back to China. In 1888, Japan issued the *yijiang* edict (*ishō jōrei*) to officially promote artistic intervention in industry. In the petition for the edict, *ishō* or *yijiang* was actually designated as the translation for the English term *design*.⁵¹

⁵⁰ The 1904 Guimao Education Edict, quoted by Chen Ruilin, 38. For details of the edict, see Zhu Youhuan, *Zhongguo jindai xuezhi shiliao*, vol. 2, section 1 [Historical Records of Modern Chinese Educational System] (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 1989).

⁵¹ Amagai Yoshinori, *Ōyō bijutsu shisō dōnyū no rekishi*, 3.

The coinage of the term *ishō* in Japan and its subsequent importation as *yijiang* to China is very revealing of how design was first conceptualized in East Asia.

The term *ishō* or *yijiang* combines the traditionally polarized *yi*, meaning idea or conception in a painting, with *jiang*, which signified craft-based practices. Traditionally, a painting is considered to display a “pictorial idea” because its formal qualities could produce certain ineffable effects that evoke moods, conceptual overtones, or extralinguistic flavors comparable to those inspired by poetry.⁵² By combining the aspirational *yi* with the lowly craftsman *jiang*, it creates a kind of craftsman of idea, an artisan crafting the ineffable. The seemingly oxymoronic term in the classical context took on a rich semantic twist in the modern case because it captures the idea of elevating the artisan and crafts to the level of art form. Unlike the term *tu'an* which was a pure Japanese invention, the term *yijiang* already possessed rich significance in classical Chinese, but the Japanese borrowed the classical Chinese expression to translate Western terms with a radical change in meaning.⁵³

The most well-known example of *yijiang* in classical Chinese comes from the Tang dynasty poet Du Fu's 杜甫 (712-770) poem in which he commended the painter Cao Ba's superior painting skills. “The emperor decreed that the General (Cao Ba) brush over the plain silk, the *yijiang* is being strenuously carried out.”⁵⁴ In Du Fu's verse, *yijiang* denotes the

⁵² Eugene Y. Wang, “‘Picture Idea’ and its Cultural Dynamics in Northern Song China.” *Art Bulletin*, vol. LXXXIX, no.3 (September, 2007): 463-481.

⁵³ Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity –China, 1900-1937* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 32-33. Liu here summarizes research by Gao Mingkai and Liu Zhengtan on patterns of new loaned neologisms from Japan.

⁵⁴ “詔謂將軍拂絹素，意匠慘澹經營中。” Taken from “Danqing yinzeng Cao jiangjun ba,” in Cao Yin, ed., *Quan tang shi* [Anthology of Tang Poetry] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1999), juan 220, 2326.

meticulous conception that goes into the creation of a painting. The outcome of *yijiang* for the Tang poet was to render the painting of the emperor's horse as lively as the horse itself. The goal of *yijiang*, in the sense Wu Mengfei understood it, was to construct something as distant as possible from the likeness of the real object itself—a new connotation that cannot be further removed from the classical usage. He used the term loosely to denote the creative process that transforms nature into design, sketches from life into geometric shapes.

Despite its classical precedence, Chinese art theorists in the 1920s almost unanimously recognized the term as a loanword from Japan, a term denoting a discipline fundamentally new to China. The new term helped legitimize and institutionalize what had been practiced merely as a kind of folk handicrafts. The layered implications of the term *yijiang* also allowed ample room for debate and manipulation. *Yijiang* was seen as a technique required for creating good design applicable to industry and a skill that could only be cultivated through fine arts. This logic perfectly granted painting and drawing use value during a time when painting and drawing constantly sought for justification. In other words, painters, traditional and Western-style alike, could attach utilitarian value to painting by way of arguing for its usefulness to design. For instance, the oil painter and theorist Wang Yachen claimed that fine arts lay at the foundation of the industry and commerce oriented education in Europe, the United States, and Japan. Their economic success could be directly attributed to having good fine arts education. Fine arts cultivate *yijiang*, which in turn produces new and creative design for modern commodities.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Wang Yachen, "Tu'an jiaoyu yu gongye de guanxi [The relationship between design education and industry]." *Meishu* (Shanghai), 2:2 (1920): 61-64.

The traditional painter Hu Peiheng 胡佩衡 (1892-1965) equally championed design as a new artistic engagement with utilitarian motivation.⁵⁶ Like Wu Mengfei, Hu Peiheng prescribed very similar principles for creating good design. They usually consisted of several steps, each requiring the use of basic geometric shapes upon which further variations should be created for the desired visual appeal. What made the process *scientific* was the application of geometry, entailing the coordination of dots, lines, circles, squares, and triangles. By the later 1910s, the design discourse had shifted from a loosely-defined industrial enterprise to a more precise, work-table oriented graphic endeavor operating on explicit principles of visual harmony. Design textbooks and manuals also began to appear in the late 1910s. The earliest surviving textbook of this type is a design manual for the purpose of training art teachers in middle schools. The textbook first lists the source material of design: lines and dots, Chinese characters and English alphabets, artifacts, flora and fauna, and landscape. It then offers pages of templates for the students to copy and reference (figure 2.18). Rather than being directly applicable to manufacturing, the templates were organized with the goal of demonstrating theories of visual harmony.

As mentioned by both Wu Mengfei and Ge Gongzhen, decorative patterns were simply called *huawen* or *huayang* before the introduction of the term design (*tu'an*) from Japan. Art theorists attempted to replace the term *huayang* literally meaning “flower pattern” —because it evoked something indigenous, pre-industrialized, and purely decorative—with the new concept design. Along with the neologism, theorists prescribed new methodological, scientific,

⁵⁶ Hu Peiheng, “Huajue: tu'an hua lüeshuo [Painting formula: brief explanation of tu'an drawing].” *Huixue zazhi* [Journal of Studies of Painting], 3 (1921): 1-5.

and technical design manuals with calculated aesthetic appeal. Since the theorists' motivation to promote design was really for the cultivation of aesthetic sensibility through fine arts, they realized the apparent paradox between arguing for design's use value and the questionable applicability of the techniques they proffered. It is worth noticing that none of the above advocates were actual practitioners of design.

While discussing the practicality of design, Wu Mengfei had to acknowledge that "although the use value of design is the most essential issue...this essay does not discuss the type of design that can be immediately applied to practical use. The reason for studying design is to cultivate an understanding of the various principles concerning how to construct lines, shapes, and colors using one's purely aesthetic vision."⁵⁷ As the design discourse developed in tandem with that of painting in the early 1920s, art theorists continued to identify affinities between design and painting. In 1925, the prominent art historian Yu Jianhua 俞劍華 (1895-1979) published an essay entitled "The Source Material for Design" in which design was solely regarded as the geometric conversion of painted images, and, thus, carried similar traditional symbolisms as in Chinese paintings. Yu Jianhua believes that since the image of bats, phoenix, cranes, and blooming peonies all symbolize wealth, the design converted from these sources should also bear the same symbolism. In a similar vein, the design of plum blossoms, evergreens, and chrysanthemum symbolize moral integrity as they do in the painterly idioms.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Wu Mengfei, "Tu'an jianghua [Lectures on design]." *Meiyu* (Aesthetic Education), 5 (1920): 50.

⁵⁸ Yu Jianhua, "Tu'an ziliao [Design material]," reprinted in Zhou Jiyin and Geng Jian, eds., *Yu Jianhua meishushi lunji* (A Collection of Yu Jianhua's Essays on Art History) (Nanjing: Dongnan daxue chubanshe, 2009), 4-13.

For those steeped in traditional Chinese painting, it is perhaps inevitable to read a design based upon plum blossoms as having cultural significance beyond the simple presentation of appealing geometric shapes. The need for allusion, therefore, prevented design from transcending boundaries of traditional aesthetics defined by Chinese painting. To sum up, by the early 1920s, the discourse emphasized both the decorative and emblematic aspects of design, which was simultaneously defined by and in opposition to painting. In terms of method, one was capable of simplifying nature and creating visually pleasing design by following a few basic methods of abstraction and color schemes. Though, domestically, design was already an active field by 1925, the intermediary role of painting in the process of its institutionalization put China on a different path from the rest of world. Even the failure in Paris could not diminish the importance of painting in the eyes of the Chinese.

2.7 The Early Pioneers of Design

Theory was often divorced from practice in the modern period. Theories of design were especially susceptible to all kinds of manipulation in China. Being the generator of discourse and theory circulating in society acquired an entrepreneurial nature in the Republican period. By speaking of design on behalf of society, artists such as Yu Jianhua, Wang Yachen, and Hu Peiheng availed themselves of public forms of circulation and modern media. None of them actually practiced design, but to claim the voice and to become the spokesperson for design had cultural cachet. The discursive sphere was a soft market place motivated by real economic imperatives – in this case, huge demand for commercial design.

Julia Andrews argues that commercial art was an extremely influential part of China's modern art world and that commercial artists, working mainly in fields related to industry and technology, were both idealistic and pragmatic.⁵⁹ In order to meet the demand for eye-catching visual stimuli, publishing houses hired painters to create illustrations and covers for their publications. The abovementioned painter Ding Song, for instance, had an extremely successful career as a "cover artist" for popular magazines in Shanghai. He created many cover designs for periodicals in the style of traditional beauty prints and calendar posters with more modern and urban looking female subjects. Ding Song's attractive cover design did not actually make use of design. Despite the modern-looking women and the urban settings, they were very heavily dependent on the calendar poster style that had been extremely popular and profitable. Though lacking the romanticization expressed in Ding Song's beauty prints, the more expedient medium of photography began to colonize areas previously claimed by traditional beauty prints and eventually dominated the representation of female beauties in the 1930s.

Design, however, remained competitive throughout the 1920s and 1930s in print despite the popularity of photography. The artist Zhang Guangyu 张光宇 (1900-1965) combined design with the traditional genre of beauty prints and created sought-after, sophisticated images. Like many young painters working in Shanghai at the time, Zhang first designed commercial graphics for the British American Tobacco Company, commonly known as BAT.⁶⁰ For marketing purposes, the style of these advertisements still belonged to the generic female

⁵⁹ Julia Andrews, "Commercial Art and China's Modernization," in Julia Andrews and Kuiyi Shen, eds., *A Century in Crisis: Modernity and Tradition in the Art of Twentieth-century China*, 181-192.

⁶⁰ Ellen Johnston Laing, *Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early Twentieth-century Shanghai* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), 171.

beauty genre derived from traditional calendar posters. Zhang Guangyu also made drawings for journals and magazines with which he seemed to have more freedom to experiment with different types of design. In 1921, he created the section “Design and Beauty” for the newspaper *Shibao Pictorial Weekly*, the chief editor of which was none other than Ge Gongzhen who hired Tao Yuanqing for *Chinese Ancient Designs* in 1925. In this small “Design and Beauty” section, Zhang Guangyu managed to appropriate the conventional female beauty with the new addition of design to create an appealing ensemble.

Even though the premise was often female fashion, the drawings did not seem to advertise fashion as much as a desire to create an altogether modern urban image. The female beauty genre simply served as a foil for the experimentations in design. In one design, a female figure, dressed in a rather traditional outfit, stands holding a long staff with its top shaped in a reversed crest decorated by the sinuous lines typical of the Art Nouveau vocabulary (figure 2.19). The inclusion of the peacock in the foreground further reinforces the connection with Art Nouveau that Zhang must have encountered through foreign publications available in Shanghai. In another design, a woman is depicted reading a book while sitting upright in bed (figure 2.20). The bed frame is made of ornamental columns. Above the woman, Zhang includes a highly decorative window frame elaborated at the top with silhouettes of geometric floral patterns. Tendrilous lines coupled with petal-like speckles spring from the vase sitting on the windowsill. Within the image, the rich variation of patterns used in depicting the window and the vegetal motifs creates a contrast with the quiet and poised reading beauty. The image is ultimately less about female beauty than it is about design.

Zhang Guangyu achieved a more organic union of female beauty and design in yet another image in the *Shibao Pictorial Weekly* (figure 2.21). In this design, the artist creates a dynamic design through modifications of a single motif. The woman's body is essentially a more elaborate extension of the peacock feathers in the background. He alternates areas shaded in black with the unshaded and varies the size and shape of the feather motif throughout the design. Around the woman's head, he adds similar fanciful speckles to create a romantic aura radiating from the figure's head, as if enchanted by the flower she holds in her hand. Zhang Guangyu's work shares certain decorative qualities with Art Nouveau, but the subdued sexuality and the uncluttered, well-balanced composition departs from European tendencies popular at the time. Compared with Liu Jipiao's depiction of the phoenix/vermillion bird adopting the same motif in Paris, Zhang Guangyu was much more willing to abstract and simplify the given motif. Disguised under the female beauty genre that generally required little interpretation, Zhang Guangyu was able to prioritize design's visual appeal. Beauty prints helped nurture a taste for abstract design in the early 1920s.

The first artist who liberated design from both painting and female beauty was the aforementioned Li Shutong. There is wide recognition of Li Shutong's formative role in the field of modern music, theater, calligraphy, and painting. His contribution to design also cannot be overlooked. Purportedly having studied under the renowned Japanese oil painter Kuroda Seiki 黒田清輝 (1866-1924) in Tokyo School of Fine Arts, he achieved the status of the first great oil painter in China. His virtuosity in calligraphy, theatre, and music, along with his later conversion to Buddhism in 1918 also made him a cultural icon who exerted influence on every aspect of artistic creation in the 1910s and 1920s. After his return from Japan in 1911, Li Shutong

taught drawing, painting, and music at the Zhejiang Second Normal School where he created a specific type of graphic art that enjoyed a great legacy in later design practice. While studying in Tokyo, as Lu Weirong argues, Li Shutong was already designing posters to advertise for the drama plays he and his fellow students staged and performed.⁶¹ Despite his devotion to teaching, his interest in design was not so much shaped by institutional structure as it was demanded by the period's needs for attractive graphic design. Upon his return to China in 1911, he worked as director of the advertising department for the newspaper *The Pacific Times* (*Taipingyang bao* 太平洋報). He not only invented a new layout for the newspaper, but also integrated design into otherwise plain advertisements. It was a refreshing change from simply recycling the decorative motifs taken from foreign publications (figure 2.22). *The Pacific Times* was the first newspaper to adopt graphic partitions in contrast to the undecorated, and unpartitioned layout common to most newspapers at the time.⁶²

Li Shutong also designed the cover for the magazine *The White Sun* (*Baiyan* 白陽), a small journal dedicated to promoting artistic education, and published from 1913 by the Zhejiang Second Normal School (figure 2.23). The cover embraces an extremely simple and abstract

⁶¹ Apart from studying Western-style painting at Tōkyō Bijutsu Gakkō, Li Shutong was also a founding member of the theatre group The Spring Willow Society (*chunliu she*) along with his fellow student Zeng Yannian, Ouyang Yuqian, and Xie Kangbai in Tokyo. They staged *Chahuanü* (an adaption from *La Dame aux Camellias* by Alexandre Dumas fils) and *Heinu yu tian lu* (*Black Slaves Cry to Heaven* based upon the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe). The *huaaju*, or Chinese spoken drama, was a popular genre born out of the influence of Western drama. It began when the Spring Willow Society formed by a group of young Chinese theatre enthusiasts in Tokyo. In addition to acting, Li Shutong was also in charge of stage design and posters advertising for their plays. For details on Li Shutong's early graphic endeavors in Tokyo, see Lu Weirong, *Chūgoku kindai bijutsu to nihon* (Modern Chinese Fine Arts and Japan) (Okayama-shi: Daigaku kyōiku shuppan, 2007), 56-60.

⁶² Jin Juzhen and Guo Changhai, "Li Shutong zai taipingyang bao shiqi de meishu huodong [Li Shutong's artistic activities during his time at the *Pacific Times*]," in Cao Bula, ed., *Hongyi dashi yishu lun* [Monk Hongyi's Theories of Art] (Hangzhou: Xiling seal engraving society, 2000), 75-89.

aesthetic. The title *Baiyang* is written in Li Shutong's idiosyncratic script characterized by a slight tilt to the left and the unpronounced hooks ending not with the conventional elegant tapering tip produced by the gradual lifting of the brush, but with a blunt dot achieved by adding pressure before the sudden lifting of the brush from the paper. The serrated outlines of the characters evoke the chiseled edges of seals at which he was known to excel. The connection with seal-carving is also reflected in the use of white characters against a rectangular black background, an imprint corresponding to the seals carved in intaglio known as the "white character" seals. A horizontal row of small black squares run behind the title column. The intersecting motif of a vertical column with a horizontal decorative pattern is mirrored, in the lower half of the page, by a row of tree patterns overlapping the slim vertical column that announces the issue and the date of the journal. The alteration between negative and positive space is key to animating the visual rhythm. He signs his name in roman letters "An Li" in the bottom left corner of the cover.

The bulky and seemingly unsophisticated decorative patterns lend a clumsy, amateurish effect to the design that appears less commercial than mainstream journals in Shanghai. The small-circle publications like *Baiyang* gave Li Shutong license to create a cover embracing the rather undercrafted aesthetics particularly amenable to the print medium. Unlike oil painting in which he would painstakingly labor on creating the effect of illumination by playing off different textures and colors, he strove for abstraction and a rather crude effect in the graphic medium. Although the publication was meant to circulate among like-minded intellectuals committed to artistic cultivation, the tendency towards formal abstraction and the diffusion of symbolism through the graphic medium had broader influences in the 1920s.

It was Tao Yuanqing who perpetuated the undercrafted aesthetics established by Li Shutong, while also continuing to expand the potential of these aesthetic beyond simple decorativeness. In 1926, Tao Yuanqing created a book cover for his friend Xu Qinwen's book *Mr. Zhao's Troubles* (*Zhao xiansheng de fannao* 趙先生底煩惱) using very similar visual idioms (figure 2.24). Li Shutong's design made use of a recognizable tree motif. Tao Yuanqing, by contrast, completely removed any interest in representation. He contains the vertically written title of the book simply with one horizontal line on top and a row of small upturned fan-shapes at the bottom. The square-shaped, highly stylized characters for the title similarly allude to the art of seal carving. The extremely minimalist design may appear nothing more than decorative, the reductive style, however, was a very powerful statement of modern design. Less is more. For example, he played with the formal similarity between the second character *xian* 先 and the third character *sheng* 生 by essentially writing them identically with just one little opening in the bottom stroke of the first character *xian* to differentiate the two. The ingenious graphic manipulation is not apparent until one attempts to read the title. This mental glitch provoked by such subtle graphic treatment signals Tao Yuanqing's deeper ambition with design beyond just the initial visual appeal.

Coda: Growth and Metabolism

The much anticipated *Chinese Ancient Designs* (1925) was a strange design compendium in terms of both conception and execution. Firstly, it served the nationalistic agenda of its publisher, the Shanghai Youzheng Book Company, a publishing house especially known for its

preservation of Chinese patrimonies through print.⁶³ Prior to its publication, design templates of foreign sources had been published, but this was the first compendium of patterns native to China. The founder of Youzheng Book Company was the artistic-minded collector-publisher Di Baoxian 狄葆賢 (1873-1941).⁶⁴ A disheartened revolutionary in exile in Japan during the late Qing Dynasty, he turned his attention to literature and art in the Republican period.⁶⁵ *Chinese Ancient Designs* partook in the cultural reforms through the power of the press. The medium of the press promoted the rediscovery of ancient Chinese design motifs and the transformation of them to enhance the appearance of Chinese-made commodities. But Tao Yuanqing's designs were never applied to any actual commodity.

Second, the editor of the book was the first Chinese historian of journalism Ge Gongzhen 戈公振 (1890-1935). Ge coupled his own ambition to promote a more expedient and direct form of journalism with Di Baoxian's interest in the preservation of Chinese culture through the press. Only a year before, Ge Gongzhen rendered F.N. Clark, Jr's *The Handbook of Journalism* into Chinese as *A Guide to Journalism*.⁶⁶ Under his editorship, the newspaper *Eastern Times* and its supplements (for which Tao Yuanqing was the graphic artist) outshined other

⁶³ For a discussion on Shanghai Youzheng Book Company and Di Baoxian's career, see Richard Vinograd, "Patrimonies in Press – Art Publishing, Cultural Politics, and Canon Construction in the Career of Di Baoxian," 245-272.

⁶⁴ According to Tao Yuanqing's friend Xu Qinwen, Di Baoxian also collected Japanese and Indian design compendia in addition to his collection of ink rubbings from the Six dynasties. Exposed to Di Baoxian's wide-ranging art and design collection, Chinese and foreign alike, Tao Yuanqing possessed significant knowledge of both painting and design at the time. See Xu Qinwen, "Lu Xun and Tao Yuanqing," in *Lu Xun riji zhong de wo* [Myself in Lu Xun's Diaries] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1979), 80-108.

⁶⁵ For a discussion on Di Baoxian's transformation from a revolutionary to an entrepreneur in the print field, see Joan Judge, *Print and Politics: 'Shibao' and the Culture of Reform in Late Qing China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996).

⁶⁶ Ge Gongzhen, preface to *Chinese Ancient Designs*.

newspapers in its attention to graphic layout. Surveying journals and magazines from all around the world, no one was more aware than Ge Gongzhen of the importance of visual presentation in journalism. It turned out, however, that Tao Yuanqing's design aligned itself much better with the literary field than journalism.

The final product did not quite serve the purposes envisioned by Di Baoxian and Ge Gongzhen. In this humble compilation, motifs are densely printed on each page with no accompanying caption or context to explain what they are. Tao Yuanqing developed his own system of first introducing simple motifs such as a bird or a cloud pattern. Then he uses the simple motifs as building blocks to construct increasingly intricate patterns on the latter pages. Ancient patterns' modularity was valuable to modern design. Simple units of lines and shapes are made for easy construction and flexible arrangement (figure 2.25).

Unlike most publications by the Youzheng Book Company, Tao Yuanqing did not trace the pattern from ink rubbings (the manner by which antiquarians preserve images of the past); instead, he simply extracted the essential linear information by free-hand drawing from the complex designs on the bronzes. What formed the basic unit that he could later rearrange and reassemble into more elaborate patterns was thus left entirely to his discretion. For instance, the same zoomorphic representation of a bird motif (however strangely embryonic) first appears as a single unit, and is then coupled with its own double rotated 180 degrees to form a more complex unit (figure 2.26). This paired motif, when horizontally multiplied, creates a band pattern, which is further layered up to form a rectangle. To form a circular design, Tao Yuanqing simply aligned the bird-like unit and its mirror image in a circular fashion. In this way, patterns became abstract and independent of the bronzes that used to bear them. The

abstracted zoomorphic forms began to take on an organic life of their own, infinitely morphing and growing into new configurations that did not exist on real bronzes. Without the metallic materiality to fall back on, the linear elements now speak for themselves. By extracting only the linear information from ancient bronzes, he transformed what was originally conceived as three-dimensional into the surface art of graphic design.

As such, these designs are not exactly decorative. The second section of the book on commercial art script further offsets the nondecorativeness of Tao Yuanqing's creation. The second part illustrates examples of "art script" or *meishuzi*, literally translated as "fine art characters." It is essentially a typographic practice, but far less standardized than the types invented in Europe and America during the same period. Since these characters were meant to be decorative and attract attention, they functioned more like pictures than words. The characters for bamboo shoots, for example, were drawn with shapes that mimic bamboo stems (figure 2.27). Beside these commercial art scripts, Tao Yuanqing's abstraction appears to have a separate agenda. Lingered between ornamentation and symbolic mysticism, Tao Yuanqing's re-configuration was, in fact, neither. First, it transcended the symbolic value of its parent source ritual bronzes; and, second, the zoomorphic and amorphic motifs were hardly viable for commercial design due to its lack of direct visual appeal and clarity.

A textile design compendium *Embroidery Design* published in 1929 by the Commercial Press included only one page from *Chinese Ancient Designs* (figure 2.28). The rest of the book largely consists of attractive figural and geometric patterns and other forms of more familiar and applicable ornamentations. Forms and formulations Tao Yuanqing experimented in *Chinese Ancient Designs* were only practiced by himself. He later transferred some of these unspecified

bold forms onto his cover designs. The same embryonic/bird motif appeared on the cover of the newspaper collection *Literary Supplement to Beijing News* (*Jingbao fukan* 京報副刊), a Beijing-based comprehensive journal established in 1918 (figure 2.29). The three registers on the cover follow the same logic found in *Chinese Ancient Patterns*: each is composed of a motif unit and then multiplied and replicated to fill each register.

A more straightforward example is the cover for the short-lived literary journal *Bili* 筆築 published in 1928 in which Tao Yuanqing practically recycled a dragon/bird motif from *Chinese Ancient Patterns*—the only minimal modification being the omission of several linear elements to better accommodate his signature at the bottom right corner and the overall balance of the design (figure 2.30, 2.31). Without the reference of *Chinese Ancient Designs*, few would have been able to identify the sources of these mute and cellular shapes. They were undoubtedly unusual cover designs and it is difficult to decipher the organic, formless, almost defiant motifs.

The underlying spirit of *Chinese Ancient Designs* is ultimately a kind of metabolist thinking. *Chinese Ancient Designs* was itself a sustainable source for Tao Yuanqing's subsequent designs. For his friend Xu Qinwen's short story collection *Wool Socks* (Maoxian wa 毛線襪), Tao Yuanqing created a dynamic and shapeless ensemble (figure 2.32). Its sinuous forms certainly resonate with the soft and cozy texture of wool socks! Upon closer observation, the design turns out to have derived from a dragon/bird motif from the first page of *Chinese Ancient Designs* (figure 2.33). Into the metamorphosis, Tao Yuanqing inserts red circles for additional visual balance. Who would have thought such delight could be derived from the transformation of an apotropaic bird into the texture of a cozy weave?

In a similar vein, another unit motif morphed from *Chinese Ancient Designs* onto one of his other cover designs (figure 2.34, 2.35). The design has little semantic connection with the book's title "*Going Home (Huijia 回家)*," but bears striking resemblance to the ornamental *taihu* rocks, one of the most important scholarly emblems in China (figure 2.36). The green vegetation and the grey stream surrounding the rock on the book cover further reinforce the association. These craggy rocks are essential Chinese garden items valued for their peculiar porous and irregular appearance. Their hollowed out shape and perforation resulting from erosion embody the dynamic transformational processes of nature.⁶⁷ They were also appreciated for their accidental resemblance to animals, birds, and mythical creatures.

Through Tao Yuanqing's graphic manipulation, the zoomorphic motif departs from ritual bronzes and travels to the book cover, only to transform itself again and miraculously into a dynamic rock known distinctively for its bizarre biological formation. Ultimately, Tao Yuanqing's design mimics organic biological growth and the dynamic transformation of natural processes. Like a cell, design functions by way of metabolism. Metabolism is not simply the sum total of chemical reactions in the human body. It is a balance, comparable to design, between building up and taking apart. It is this balance that powers growth.

Within the microcosm of design, Tao Yuanqing expresses a larger claim concerning the concept of growth and process. The problem of modernity was closely associated with a linear consciousness of time and history, of science and civilization. The temporal concept was further

⁶⁷ Seen as the sacred mountains, the rocks were meant originally to attract good geomantic influences in order to lure immortals. Later there developed a taste for irregular volumes of rock in and of themselves. See Edwin Morris, *The Gardens of China: History, Art and Meanings* (New York: Scribner, 1983), 82.

made popular in China by Social Darwinian theories translated in the beginning of the twentieth century.⁶⁸ Benjamin Schwarz has demonstrated how evolutionary theory penetrated not only philosophical, historical and social spheres, it was also key to literary realism as argued by Lydia Liu.⁶⁹ The unpredictable images of metamorphoses created by Tao Yuanqing challenge the linear perspective of progress. By mimicking biological growth, artistic creation makes arguments for both science and art. Ironically, when Ge Gongzhen wrote that “design occupies no unimportant niche in the realm of modern sciences” in the preface to *Chinese Ancient Designs*, he meant something that he did not realize. Instead of the hardening and masculinization of the visual arts to embody a strong nation, Tao Yuanqing let the hard metal melt, soften, and diffuse into shapeless, dynamic mass and energy, hoping that the nation, too, would engage in such dynamic metamorphosis. As a painter, Tao Yuanqing never attempted to represent the observational world. In art, after all, it is encountering what we cannot see in the physical world that surprises our senses and engages our minds.

⁶⁸ On the problematic of modernity in China with regard to social Darwinism, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern*, 43-47.

⁶⁹ Lydia H. Liu, “Life as Form: How Biomimesis Encountered Buddhism in Lu Xun.” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 68:1 (Feb. 2009): 21-54.

Chapter Three

The Games of Vision: Line, Linearity, and Lineage

Introduction: A Beautiful Book

Tao Yuanqing's book covers were often appreciated and criticized for the same reason: being naïve and unsophisticated. In the cover design for Lu Xun's short story collection *Wandering* (*Panghuang* 徬徨) from 1926, for example, the figures are depicted gazing upward at an outsized, comically misshapen sun (figure 3.1). As if the ragged, misshapen sun is not enough to provoke, the unsophisticated, stubby lines simulating the rays of sunshine were drawn so seriously and diligently that they could only be matched by a child. The artlessness was taken for a sign of incompetence by some contemporaries while others, especially Lu Xun, celebrated the expressiveness of the childlike depiction. It may be helpful to think of Tao Yuanqing's intended deskilling as a modern manifestation of the notion of deliberate amateurism, a fundamental principle of the Chinese literati ideal. The reasons for such deliberation, however, are different in the modern period.

For those who criticized Tao Yuanqing's incomprehensible designs, the cover for *Wandering* was, in fact, redeemed as having self-contained meaning. "It was the only cover in which one could sense the bewilderedness one feels at sunset," commented one reader before he turned to attack Tao Yuanqing's other designs.¹ In addition to the apparent visual incomprehensibility, the reader's major complaint about these designs was their lack of pictorial

¹ Wu Binqing, "Reader's opinion—guanyu fengmian [On cover design]." *Kaiming*, 1:5 (1928): 287-289.

beauty. In the same reader's opinion column, however, some commended Tao Yuanqing's book designs for being capable of expressing pictorial beauty.² The concept of pictorial beauty became a dominant discourse in the discussion of works of art in the 1920s. One obvious reason for such fascination with beauty was the introduction of the *beaux-arts* tradition into China via Japan. The term was translated into *bijutsu* in Japanese or *mei-shu* in Chinese, meaning "beautiful crafts." The linguistic novelty required conceptual elaboration. Prior to the introduction of the French *beaux-arts* tradition, Chinese painting had not been discussed in terms of pictorial beauty. In a similar vein, since the linguistic distinction between aesthetic and beautiful do not exist in Chinese, the famous aesthetic education launched by Cai Yuanpei was likewise translated as *mei-yu* meaning "beauty (aesthetic) education" with the same character "mei" as in *mei-shu*, or fine arts.

The focus on pictorial beauty was further reinforced by the formalist-driven canonization of French modern painting by English art critics such as Clive Bell and Roger Fry whose essays were translated and deeply appreciated. The beauty discourse then easily lapsed into discussions of the artist's interiority and subjectivity. In China, the individualism discourse was usually substantiated through contemporary literary criticisms. The collaboration between Lu Xun and Tao Yuanqing sufficiently demonstrates the close and fluid relationship between writing and painting during the period. Lu Xun included many of his own drawings in his books. Tao Yuanqing published prose and poetry in the official journal of the first National Art Academy where he taught design until 1929. In Lu Xun's desperate attempt to attack imitators

² Guo Li, "Reader's opinion—guanyu fengmian [On cover design]." *Kaiming*, 2:4 (1929): 251-253.

of foreign artists, he sponsored the publication of many foreign artists' monographs in China, most notably, Aubrey Beardsley (1872-1898) and Fukiya Kōji 落谷虹児 (1898-1979) in 1929, since their style was widely copied in China. To further garner fame for Tao Yuanqing, Lu Xun specially required all publishing companies to give credit to Tao Yuanqing on a separate blank page after the title page (figure 3.2).

It is noteworthy that Tao Yuanqing was much more celebrated among writers than painters in the 1920s. Out of the fourteen people who contributed commemorative articles after his death in 1929, more than half were writers, along with two musicians. The book as a medium drew an expansive network of intellectuals, artists, and entrepreneurs. It was around the year 1925 when privately owned publishing houses were established by communities of self-conscious intellectuals who dedicated themselves to the dissemination of modern writings. The relaxed and creative atmosphere allowed book cover design to flourish in the late 1920s and 1930s. On the medium of the book, Johanna Drucker observes that it is a genre as little bound by constraints of medium or form as those more familiar rubrics of 'painting' and 'sculpture'. It is an area which needs description, investigation, and critical attention before its specificity will emerge. Any attempt to describe a heterogeneous field of activities through particular criteria breaks down in the face of specific books or artists.³

Under the paradigm of aesthetic education (discussed in Chapter 2), literature, art, and music, fields that were traditionally associated, enjoyed an even closer alliance. The medium of painting always enjoyed interchangeable or complimentary relationships with calligraphy and

³ Johanna Drucker, *The Century of Artists' Books*, 5; 14.

poetry in the past. While fulfilling a range of romanticist ideals proffered by contemporary literary figures, Tao Yuanqing's work, I argue, registers not respect, but contempt for excessive romanticization, which he found to be subjects fit for parody. Yet, he was the elected writer's best friend because his art was evocative and directly made use of the medium of the book. I have demonstrated in Chapter 1 that the book cover collaboration between Lu Xun and Tao Yuanqing was intended to deny the desire for easy meaning and the correspondence to the book's literary content. For literary journals and his paintings more broadly, Tao Yuanqing was free to play with old themes and invent new ones. He was also much more methodical in his approach than what the vague commentaries by aesthetic romanticists might suggest. By utilizing pictorial devices developed from painting in his designs, his art delivers a rare experience that challenged the expectation of vision and visuality.

3.1 Dis-enchantment and Re-enchantment (Flute Player under Moonlight)

Tao Yuanqing designed a cover for the literary magazine *Bailu Monthly* 白露 inaugurated in November 1926 (figure 3.3). The extremely succinct design depicts, in Tao's own words, "a goddess intermittently playing the flute under the crescent light and silver waves. A tree of distinguished flowers listens intently."⁴ Unlike the other journal covers he previously designed that are thematically ambiguous, the design adorning *Bailu Monthly* is Tao Yuanqing's adaptation of the popular literary motif "flute player under moonlight." Yet one can hardly

⁴ Qian Juntao, "Tao Yuanqing lun," 108.

identify it with the literary theme because of the artist's unconventional treatment of the otherwise familiar motif.

The origin of the motif reaches back to the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BCE) in the State of Qin. The legend has it that a young man named Xiao Shi 簫史 was so good at playing the *xiao* flute that he could mimic the cry of the phoenix. The Duke of Qin let his daughter Nong Yu 弄玉 marry Xiao Shi because she was also talented in playing the *xiao* flute. In a few years, under Xiao Shi's influence, Nong Yu, too, can mimic the cry of the phoenix with the flute; his mimicry is so vivid that a phoenix comes to their house. Eventually they both become immortals, entering heaven with Xiao Shi riding on the dragon and Nong Yu on the phoenix.⁵ The association of the sound of the *xiao* flute with transcendence and romance readily lent the legend to a wide range of poetic adaptations. The following couplet by the Tang dynasty poet Chen Tao 陳陶 (812?-885?) from "Five Poems of Random Thoughts in Leisure 閒居雜興五首" anchors the motif's connection with immortals, in particular the flute player immortal Wang Ziqiao:

長愛真人王子喬，五松山月伴吹簫。
從他浮世悲生死，獨駕蒼鱗入九霄。

I have long admired Wang Ziqiao the perfected being,
With the company of the mountain moon above the Five Pine you play the flute.
Emerging from the floating world grieved by life and death,
Alone you ride the dark dragon and enter the nine clouds.⁶

⁵ Li Fang, *Taiping guan ji* (*Extensive Records of the Taiping Reign* (977-978)), vol. 4, Shenxian 4: Xiao Shi. (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1990), vol. 1, 1043—22.

⁶ Chen Tao, section from "Five Poems of Random Thoughts in Leisure," in Cao Yin, *Quan tang shi*, juan 746, 8578.

The famous Tang dynasty poet Du Mu 杜牧 (803-852), in contrast, launched his imagination using the legend's romantic aspect in his poem "Sent to Magistrate Han Chuo of Yangzhou 寄揚州韓綽判官":

青山隱隱水迢迢，秋盡江南草未凋。
二十四橋明月夜，玉人何處教吹簫。

Green hills are indistinct, water is remote,
The end of autumn, but the grass yet withered in the South.
The Twenty-four bridges under the bright moon at night,
Where are the beautiful ladies playing the flute?⁷

Many variations of the same motif exist in Chinese poetry since the Tang Dynasty. As a common motif for both romance and immortality, it was conveniently transposed to many particular contexts throughout Chinese history. The overall goal was, nonetheless, to express ideal transcendence or romantic sentimentality by evoking the otherworldly sound of the *xiao* flute. The melancholic, reverberative sound of the *xiao* simulates the cry of the immortal phoenix, and sometimes, it was used to evoke emotions such as nostalgia and longing more generally in literary and visual representations. Variations on the theme shared idealized imageries, such as the distant mountains, remote water, phoenix (sometimes the Chinese phoenix tree), a flute player, and the moon.

A late Qing painting entitled *The Flute Player* by the popular figure painter Fei Danxu 費丹旭 (better known by his style name Fei Xiaolou 費曉樓) (1801-1850) adapts this poetic motif to accommodate the urban taste of mid-19th century Shanghai (figure 3.4). Dressed in a sensuous bright red robe with blue lapel, the flute player supports herself on the hedge of the veranda

⁷ Du Mu, "Sent to Magistrate Han Chuo of Yangzhou," in *Quan tang shi*, juan 523, 6028.

and appears engrossed in her own music. The woman possesses a “delicate, morbid, and wistful beauty that embodied the vogue of the time.”⁸ Our attention is fully devoted to her dainty figure revealed through the intentional space in between the two tree trunks. To generate the effect of illumination, the painter carefully manipulates water solubility in the ink to create varied tonality and opacity in the leaves enshrouded in the mist represented by an expanse of unpainted space. A full moon hangs in the night sky with a tint of yellow suggesting its luminosity. The appearance of a small bamboo grove nestled under the trees behind the veranda hints at the faintly painted shore that further implies the existence of a body of water represented by the unpainted space below the veranda. Here and there, the painter adds standard space filler motifs, such as the rocks and grass in the foreground and details on the veranda, to complete the image of a tranquil summer night serenaded by the sound of the *xiao*.

The cover Tao Yuanqing designed in 1926 for *Bailu Monthly* depicts the same motif. In his design, a nude female figure of exaggerated proportions replaces the delicate traditional beauty. Her head is turned 180 degrees, presenting the viewer with an impossible profile as her eyes gaze upwards the misshapen crescent floating above. The appeal of the motif traditionally lied in its ability to evoke the sound of the flute. As noted above, Fei Danxu manipulated ink washes to render quietude against which one is naturally left to imagine the sound of the flute. In Tao Yuanqing’s design, instead of aiming for a calm and serene atmosphere, the picture is replete with suggestions of movement. Such energy overthrows every dimension that had been hitherto associated with the subject matter. Tao Yuanqing nonetheless included all of the

⁸ Richard M. Barnhart et al, *Three Thousand Years of Chinese Painting* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 292.

essential elements required for the recognition of the motif; the extremely abstract manner in which he depicted these elements, however, could not have been further from that of the late Qing painter.

Tao Yuanqing fittingly entitled his design *Goddess*, or *nüshen* in Chinese, evoking the classical Western icon of the nude goddess that he had merged with that of the flute player. Her flute momentarily forgotten, the wide-open mouth and the flowing hair seem to suggest a state of cheerfulness that stands in contrast to the conventional melancholy. Around her legs, four abstract curlicues suffice to denote water, or “silver waves”, as Tao Yuanqing himself described them. The oblique tree and its floral leaves harmonize with the overall curvilinear rendering, exuding energy and movement. The artist so simplifies the design that one can even count the number of brushstrokes used to convey the essence of the motif. The abbreviation not only serves to eliminate the sentimentality invested in earlier imagery, but is also very conducive to expressing the supernatural nature of the motif.

Though goddess or *nüshen* may refer to any supernatural female power in general, it often alluded to the goddess Venus in China, especially after the publication of Guo Moruo’s 郭沫若(1892-1978) popular anthology *The Goddess* (*Nüshen* 女神) in 1921. An embodiment of love and sexuality, the icon of the goddess served as a liberating power opposing sexual repression in the arts. The nudity and undulating hair in Tao Yuanqing’s *Goddess* enhance its connection with the idea of Venus.

Tao Yuanqing was not the first painter to adapt this motif into design; the painter Zhang Guangyu took up the subject matter several years earlier (figure 3.5). As noted in the previous chapter, he created the section “Design and Beauty” for *Shibao Pictorial Weekly* in 1921. In one of

these designs, he depicted a female figure in traditional Chinese garment and hairdo sitting on the edge of a boat in the act of playing the flute. Zhang displayed his artistic agency by allowing the viewer an unusual, oblique perspective: the figure seen from above only occupies the bottom left quarter of the composition. An oversize full moon appears against a dark sky at the top of the design. Between the expanse of water and the dark sky, a small landscape extends diagonally across the length of the picture. It is a generic landscape composed of an arched bridge connecting two sides of low rolling hills, a small pavilion on the bridge and willow trees by the bank.

Using rather generic figural and landscape motifs, Zhang Guangyu achieved a rare visual dynamism with the help of design principles. Abstraction and geometrization in design remove what could have been emotive if the same subject were made as a painting. There was no intention to probe the viewer's psychology. The visual power derives from rationality rather than empathy. Printed next to drawings and photographs displaying contemporary female fashion, Zhang Guangyu's *tu'an* utilizes the attractive genre of female beauty to showcase his innovation in graphic design. The poetic motif contains the beauty within a context, an environment, and is thus less direct than generic depictions of modern female beauty in which so much emphasis is placed on make-up and fashion. The image is aesthetically close to Fei Danxu's painting, but Zhang Guangyu's sober, innovative abstraction allowed little room for sentimentalism. Abstraction alone was the subject of contemplation.

In the *One Hundred Beauties* by Dan Duyu introduced in Chapter 1, one also finds this popular imagery depicted in an even more detached manner (figure 3.6). The flute player is juxtaposed with a nude female contemplating her own reflection by the water. Presented in a

back view under full moon, the anonymous and motionless figure casts a dark shadow behind her, as if to proclaim the theme's own diminished allure in the modern period. On the opposite page, by contrast, the daring depiction of the self-reflexive nude marks the height of the psychological interest of female sexuality and narcissism. The verses above also grant more conceptual appeal to the nude. Above the flute player, it simply writes: "the cold night penetrates the lonely flute," whereas the verse above the nude figure is psychologically charged by referring to the seventeen-century literary figure (perhaps also historic) Feng Xiaoqing (1595-1612) who was known to have found refuge in her own reflection: "Different from Xiaoqing's sorrowful looking at her reflection, the clear stream and the white rocks set you off in a nice contrast." A talented poetess and beauty, Xiaoqing's tragic life as concubine attracted many social scientists to inquire into narcissism and psychoanalysis in the 1920s.⁹ The period's fascination with female sexuality found more outlet in the self-reflexive and self-destructive female psyche than the by now insipid shadow-casting flute player. Images such as the flute player were nevertheless included in the set to fulfill its encyclopedic dimension and to offset the more bold representations of the female.

By contrast, Tao Yuanqing's flute player confronts the very decline of the traditional motif and revives it to bear out contemporary psychological complications. To further entertain the comparisons, let us turn to an oil painting of the same subject created by the famous Xu Beihong also painted in 1926 (figure 3.7). The painting *Sound of the Flute* showcases Xu

⁹ China's most distinguished sociologist and eugenicist Pan Guangdan (1898-1967), for instance, dedicated himself to a study on Xiaoqing's narcissism in 1927. On the Republican fascination with the literary figure Xiaoqing, see Jing Tsu, *Failure, Nationalism, and Literature: The Making of Modern Chinese Identity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 149-153.

Beihong's highly developed technical skill in the *beaux-arts* manner that he acquired when studying in France.¹⁰ It is a romantic portrait of his wife, Jiang Biwei, playing the flute in the luminous glow of dusk. Unlike Fei Danxu's beauty in which sensuality is conveyed through both figural depiction and the environment around her, Xu Beihong devoted much of his attention to modeling the face of the flute player whose intense gaze indicates a state of immersion and concentration. The laborious modeling of the face creates a compelling verisimilitude evocative of the presence of the figure and the sound of her music in the illusionistic space. The excessively illuminated cheek further directs our attention to the face as if one can peek through the illumination to the musician's interiority and feel the spell cast by the sound of the flute.

In Fei Danxu's painting, it is the manipulation of ink and spatial arrangement that evoke the otherworldly sound of the flute. The effect of modeling and chiaroscuro in oil painting is equally conducive to rendering the desired luminosity and sensuality essential to conjuring up the sound of music. Although Xu Beihong interpreted the motif with a new medium, he nonetheless adhered to the sentimentality deeply-seated in the Chinese poetic tradition, and, therefore, familiar to contemporary viewers. Tao Yuanqing's *Goddess* represents a different synesthetic approach to evoke music. Tao Yuanqing's flute player, ironically, holds the flute without playing it. The music is no longer visualized through the gesture of blowing the instrument. It is by way of abstract patterns, dynamic lines, and, perhaps, the very fact that she is not playing the flute, that the imagination of sound is induced. Rhythm was a very enabling

¹⁰ Andrews, *The Art of Modern China*, 42.

idea to describe Tao Yuanqing's work. Many aestheticians of the 1920s as will be discussed below, understood abstract drawings and paintings in conjunction with the non-observational art of music. To think of painting as having the same mechanism as literature and science was not as good as, in Feng Zikai's words, "the musicalization (*yinyuehua*) and calligraphication (*shufa hua*) of painting."¹¹ As Walter Pater famously claimed: "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music."¹²

Tao Yuanqing defamiliarized the transcendental and sensuous aspect of the motif so as to evacuate all referentiality that would help to make sense of the work through traditional interpretative habit. He discarded the traditional ink painting and resisted the ready-made formula of oil painting borrowed from Europe and Japan. He achieved compact yet layered expressions by reclaiming the primacy of lines, which had been one of the fundamental characteristics of East Asian art. With the print medium, he demonstrated how simple linear elements could be manipulated in ways impossible prior to the 1920s.

Tao Yuanqing made a cover design using the same motif for the literary journal *Gong Xian* 貢獻 in its February issue of 1928 (figure 3.8). Less dramatic and more minimal than *Goddess*, the design assumes a much calmer mood. The female figure is depicted sitting on the foreground and playing the flute against a background of flying geese over rolling hills. The calmness of the subject matter is disturbed by the lines' unusual bluntness—scratchy with uneven edges. While each line is a unit of the larger construction, Tao Yuanqing did not use

¹¹ Feng Zikai, "Untitled." *Xiaoshuo yuebao* (The Short Story Monthly), 19:1 (1928): illustration page.

¹² Walter Pater, "The School of Giorgione," in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 86.

them quite *constructively*. Only five dark, curved lines were used to represent the body, arms, and legs of the figure. Disconnected from each other, they appear to be individual units that take a life of their own. Their palpable harshness increases the weight of each individual stroke. The mode of mark-making seems to be more indebted to engraving tools than painting brushes. He was never a print maker as such, but as a graphic artist for publishing companies, he was made sensitive to the process of transferring design created with a painting brush to the printed surface. It seems that instead of conceiving his lines as the result of one gesture of the hand, he treated his lines as if each of the two edges of a line were gouged out separately, like in a woodcut. Tao Yuanqing's oil painting teacher Chen Baoyi once commented on the forcefulness of Tao's brushwork and likened it to a knife blade.¹³

The simulation of the wood-block print effect with a painting brush reaches back to the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) in China. While it was wood workers who diligently imitated the nuanced brushwork in order to attain a degree of cultural respectability, the refreshing style and the materiality associated with the wood inspired painters from the Ming Dynasty to emulate the woodcut effect in painting.¹⁴ In the case of Tao Yuanqing in the 1920s, it was no longer the fascination with wood and its materiality that motivated him to create 'knife-paintings.' The raw, under-crafted effect imbues the picture with a certain non-mechanical presence reflecting the human trace that created it. Compared with the slick and colorful commercial art of the same period, the craftiness humanizes the picture, giving it a seemingly

¹³ Xu Qinwen, "Lu Xun and Tao Yuanqing," 82.

¹⁴ Eugene Y. Wang, "The Rhetoric of Book Illustration," 181-218, in *Treasures of the Yen-ching: Seventy-fifth Anniversary of the Harvard-Yenching Library: Exhibition Catalogue* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Yen-ching Library, Harvard University, 2003), 207.

unaffected and unsophisticated look, not unlike Li Shutong's cover design for the *Baiyang* journal fifteen years earlier (discussed in Chapter 2). Moreover, the combination of the unusual rough brush texture with the tender motif created a perplexing dissonance. Tao Yuanqing's appropriation of the classical Chinese poetic motif naturally prompts hermeneutic attempts, but, as noted above, since the brushstrokes take on a life of their own, the image resists easy interpretation, being no more than an exercise of abstraction. Utilizing a motif so rich in allusion yet so overused, the design renews interest in the subject by way of abstraction. It acquires new meanings within the artistic environment of the late 1920s precisely because it revived old imagery with a new emphasis on linearity while doing away with traditional frames of references.

One only has to compare the *Gong Xian* cover with the cover for Xu Qinwen's novel *Wu Qi Zhi Lei* 無妻之累 published in 1937 to appreciate the visual power of Tao's intended clumsiness (figure 3.9). The 1937 cover recycled the 1928 design with a few modifications that completely altered the original merit of the design. The new cover smooths out the rough edges of the lines and cleans up the free-floating, non-representational short lines in the original design. A more elaborate hairdo is added to replace the minimal undulating hair lines. Instead of the one-stroke curlicue delineating the original face, the face is now carefully drawn with two separate strokes, and an eyebrow is added to refine the facial features. Faithful to the poetic motif, a ragged moon is added next to the row of geese, crowding the space and spoiling the well-balanced simplicity of the 1928 design. Unlike the chipped, imperfect seal on *Gong Xian's* cover, the artist's signature is "properly" mended into a full circular seal. Nine years after Tao Yuanqing's death, the "updated" design could not have misunderstood more his original visual

drama. The schematized, smooth linear elements took away the pleasure of looking at a flat surface while feeling its counter-intuitive raggedness. The retouches, aiming to achieve a more “complete and finished” image only manage to remove Tao Yuanqing’s intended lack of polish. The 1928 version invites the viewer to pause and dwell on the image because one cannot quite make out what is going on at first sight. The “more finished” cover design fails to offer the heuristic stimulation for the viewer to pause and to look more carefully. Tao Yuanqing’s originality lies in the combination of his choice of subject and in his manner of reworking these subjects, whereby a shared cultural foundation provides an entry point to discover the unfamiliar. Or it could work in the opposite way: the desire to rationalize the initial, immediate enchantment leads one to recognize the (dis)connection with the past. Ultimately, Tao Yuanqing’s art created a feedback loop travelling back and forth between perception and judgment.

3.2 Beauty and Childlikeness

By offering a style that lacks the usual varnish and refinement, Tao Yuanqing tapped into a contemporary discursive trend which embraced the notion of *zhizhuo*, loosely translated into “childlikeness” in artistic creation. Writing in 1923, the oil painter Wang Yachen justifies the childlike and clumsy by claiming that, “at first sight, it appears unfinished and the artist does not seem committed; although one is initially unused to it, it is often imbued with

incredible beauty.”¹⁵ The endorsement of a childlikeness and clumsiness itself was not new to Chinese art. The discourse of childlikeness harks back to the late sixteenth century when Li Zhi 李贄 (1527-1602) proposed the childlike mind philosophy. By accusing the Confucian educational apparatus of corrupting one’s mind, Li Zhi fervently attacked Confucian orthodoxy and numerous distortions of Confucius’s original ideas.¹⁶ The new subjectivity led Li Zhi to reject Confucian classics and to promote popular literature such as *Water Margin* and *The Romance of the Western Chamber*. The cultivation of innocence and spontaneity is a paradox. One had to learn the Confucian convention in order to unlearn it. Painters in the Ming dynasty such as Chen Hongshou 陳洪綬 (1598-1652) who epitomized the concept of the unspoiled mind and rediscovery of the self, painted contemporary subjects within a classical framing, in order to turn past tropes into parody. The disillusionment and suspicion of lofty motives expressed via a deliberate gaucherie mirrors Li Zhi’s doubt of the lofty gestures purported by Confucian conventionality.¹⁷ Ironically, Chen Hongshou’s non-conformist, eccentric style gained a widespread legacy in the late 19th and 20th century and eventually became one of the most appealing styles to the intellectuals in the 1920s.

What separates the childlikeness discourse of the 1920s from previous occurrences was its perceived connection with the notion of beauty. In the aforementioned quote from Wang

¹⁵ Wang Yachen, “Yishu shang de zhizhuo gan [The childlikeness in art],” in *Wang Yachen lun yi* [Wang Yachen’s Essays on Art] (Shanghai: Shanghai shuhua chubanshe, 2010), 49. The essay was originally published in *Shishi xinbao*, June 4, 1923.

¹⁶ For Li Zhi’s theory on the childlike mind and the query for the childlike in late Ming, see Frances Weightman, *The Quest for the Childlike in Seventeenth-century Chinese Fiction: Fantasy, Naivety, and Folly* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 27-66.

¹⁷ James Cahill, *The Compelling Image* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 137. Also for discussions on Chen Hongshou’s self-consciousness as a painter, see 106-145.

Yachen, this link was made explicit. He identified the requirement of beauty as the top consideration for all works of art. In pre-modern art theory, painting was not evaluated by pictorial beauty. Painting, like poetry, was thought to help men establish a relationship with the universe.¹⁸ Brushwork was at the heart of the principles of Chinese painting. Virtuoso brushwork should not only give form to things, but also render nature beyond mere likeness. Overall, painting's goal was to achieve balance between self-development and harmony with nature. If anything, pictorial prettiness was to be avoided at all cost. While color and luster (*hua*) were legitimate concerns of painting, one must eschew mere prettiness, a quality loved by the vulgar, hated by the cultured, and tabooed by the principles of art.¹⁹ The encounter with European artistic concepts offered Chinese artists conceptual weapons and practical tools, but also confused them about what the ultimate function of art should be. The central concern in the 1920s was how to gauge the quality and value of an artwork in the modern period when traditional art criticism no longer applied.

The debate on the intrinsic value of art, namely art for art's sake versus utilitarian art was a contention in China in the 20's and 30's. In the context of commemorating Tao Yuanqing's death, for instance, a fellow artist deplores the polarized position among artists: the first group insists art's independent value hinges upon the notion of beauty in and of itself; the second

¹⁸ Zhang Yanyuan, *Record of Famous Paintings* (847), translated by Lin Yutang in *The Chinese Theory of Art* (New York: G.P. Putman's Sons, 1967), 43-62.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 197.

solely prioritizes society's needs in their art.²⁰ This critic acknowledges that Tao Yuanqing largely belongs to the former group, but rises above simplistic self-sufficiency.

Attempting to clarify the confusion among Chinese artists and theorists, the French-trained innovator of Chinese art Lin Fengmian argues that art and society should not be seen in such oppositional and polarized light. Instead, he likens the issue to the chicken-and-egg dilemma. According to him, artists should by no means be the slave of mainstream social forces. Once an artwork is created and enters society, it naturally acquires meaning and awakens societal forces. The artist participates in society by way of self-expression. Art does not belong to the artist himself, nor to the nation, but to the collective human condition.²¹

Lin Fengmian's authoritative claim favoring artist's self-expression over utilitarianism reified the notion of beauty as a valid metric for art's intrinsic value. Prior to Lin Fengmian's claim, aestheticians had already argued for the goal of artistic creation as self-expression rather than utilitarianism in non-observational arts such as poetry and music.²² Much ink was then spilled to define and substantiate the new concept of aesthetic beauty. The earliest systematic investigation of beauty *Introduction to Aesthetics* was published by the aesthetician Lü Cheng 吕澂 (1896-1989) in 1923. Lü Cheng's definition of beauty echoes the empathy theory exemplified by Wilhelm Worringer's in his 1907 treatise *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*. For Lü Cheng, the prerequisite for beauty is concrete form. He had, little to say about abstraction. He oddly

²⁰ Baiyi, "Wo suo renshi de Tao Yuanqing xiansheng [The Tao Yuanqing I know]." *Yadanna*, 1:6 (1931): 21-32.

²¹ Lin Fengmian, "Yishu de yishu yu shehui de yishu [Art for art's sake and art for society's sake]." *Chenbao xingqi huabao* [The Morning Post Sunday Picture Section], 2:85 (1927).

²² Zong Baihua, "Meixue yu yishi luetan," in *Yijing* (Beijing: Commercial Press, 2011), 7-10. Originally published in *Shishi xinbao xuedeng*, March, 10, 1920.

appropriates the Buddhist ideal of *shan* or “goodness” to distinguish abstraction from beauty. For him, the manifestation of beauty is objectified experience through the empathy mechanism.²³ In other words, latent aesthetic tendencies are manifest once the judging audience come into contact with the concrete objects. Although Lü Cheng seems to be placing more agency on the beholder rather than the creative subject, in reality, just as use value was never so polarized in East Asia, the subject and object were also not as polarized as they were often represented in aesthetic experience in European modernism.²⁴ Equal emphasis is placed on both object and the judging subject for the activation of what Lü Cheng defines as an aesthetic experience. This characterizes the mainstream of aesthetic beliefs in the 1920s. As a result, virtually everything non-abstract might be aestheticized and this provided Lü Cheng and other aestheticians with a foundation to support the “art for life’s sake” ideal.

The theory’s unease with abstraction limited it to the discursive field. Lü Cheng’s separation of abstraction from the realm of beauty failed to explain actual works of art that were becoming increasingly abstract. Tao Yuanqing posed many challenges to the discursive field of both design and aesthetics more generally. As noted in Chapter 2, using ancient motifs was characteristic of much of Tao Yuanqing’s work despite the critical attitude towards recycling traditional icons in the discursive and pedagogical discussions of design. To appreciate

²³ On the discussion on Lü Cheng’s aesthetic theory, see Chen Wangheng, *20 shiji zhongguo meixue bentilun wenti* [The Ontology of Twentieth-century Chinese Aesthetic Theories] (Wuhan: Wuhan University Press, 2007), 74-82.

²⁴ Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 158.

abstraction in painting and design, Chinese critics had to turn to different formulations of beauty.

Not unlike the process by which the new term *tu'an* (design) was parsed out by Chinese artists and theorists, the unfamiliar concept of beauty was framed and explicated vis-à-vis more familiar discourses—in this case it was coupled with the cult of childlikeness. The childlikeness-cum-beauty interpretive logic was not only applied to Chinese painting, but represented the only possibility to understand European modernism for the Chinese artists. “Among contemporary European artworks,” Wang Yachen writes, “many exhibit a crude, childlike sensibility, such as Cézanne and Van Gogh, induced by their innermost rhythmic movement.”²⁵ He endorses the beauty of crude childlikeness as the height of artistic subjectivity, able to overcome mimesis in representation (further discussed below).

There were two different trends in the cult of childlikeness. The first, best represented by Feng Zikai and his *manhua* genre, embodies a romantic ideal of the child representing purity and simplicity. Feng Zikai readily presented his own five children as protagonists in his *manhua* under the title *Portraits of the Children* (兒童相). In it, he depicts children at play such as in *Zhanzhan's bicycle* (figure 3.10), *experiments' sequence* (figure 3.11), and the juxtaposition of children's innocent behaviors with complications of the adult's world (figure 3.12). It is easy to understand how the artist was attracted to the untainted, innocent fantasy world of the children. In his own writing, Feng Zikai constantly idealized the childlike heart (*chi zi zhi xin*) as the state of absolute truth. He once wrote:

²⁵ Wang Yachen, *Wang Yachen lun yi*, 122.

I adore children, they are unsullied by the worldly mire. When scolded they respond with laughter, and stay not angry when spanked. Their hearts are always in repose, their words fresh whenever they speak. Sadly as they grow, worldliness clouds their innocence.²⁶

The gradual approach of adulthood is thought of not as a gain of reason and intellect, but, rather, as an irretrievable loss of the true nature possessed at the beginning of our lives. As Barmé rightly observes, “it is a nostalgia tinged by the sense that as an adult he had lost the innocence, simplicity, and courage of youth.”²⁷

There was also a tendency to consider the unsocialized state of the child as most appreciative of beauty. “The recognition of beauty was inherent in human beings, but was later destroyed by social influences and the lure of money. Only a child’s recognition of beauty is pure, innocent, and natural.”²⁸ The core of Cai Yuanpei’s aesthetic education, therefore, was to preserve and cultivate the natural sense of beauty already inherent in the child. Lu Xun’s brother Zhou Zuoren, who was considered the father of modern Chinese children’s literature laments the traditional conception of children: “we have for a long time misunderstood children by either regarding them as miniature adults, and therefore cramming them with the great classics; or seeing them as undeveloped human beings, devoid of knowledge and experience.”²⁹ As early as in 1914, Zhou Zuoren published *Hans Christian Andersen’s Biography* and in 1919, a

²⁶ Feng Zikai, “Tan zijide manhua [On my own manhua],” in *Feng Zikai yishu suibi* (Feng Zikai Art Essay) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1999), 174. Here I use the translation by Geremie Barmé in *An Artist Exile: A Life of Feng Zikai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 134,

²⁷ Barmé, 128.

²⁸ Suyue, “Ertong de meigan [The sense of beauty in the child].” *Weiyin*, 21-22 (1925): 33.

²⁹ Zhou Zuoren, “Children’s Literature,” in *Ertong wenxue xiaolun: zhongguo xin wenxue de yuanliu* [Theories on Children’s Literature: Chinese New Literature Studies] (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), 37.

translation of *The Little Match Girl* in the periodical *New Youth*.³⁰ He admired Andersen's fairytales because "Andersen observes the world with a child's eyes and then writes with a poet's pen—wonderful and natural, his writing truly qualifies as divine."³¹

The embrace of childlikeness is one manifestation of the popular explanation of the creative process as it was understood in China during the 1920s. In an essay arguing for the necessity of artistic education, Lü Cheng expounds this belief, arguing that such education locates artistic impulses in repressed desires, which were then sublimated into recognizable artistic forms able to fulfill the unconscious needs of the spectators within a community.³² This particular belief in artistic creation became more dominant among Chinese theorists after the publication of Lu Xun's translation of Kuriyagawa Hakuson's *Symbols of Depression* (1924).³³ The crux of Hakuson's literary criticism is that the foundation of art lies in depression and vexation born out of the oppression of life force, and its means of representation is symbolism in the broad sense. Lu Xun deeply appreciated Hakuson's literary view because it identified life force, something other than libido (central to Freud's famous formulation), as the ultimate source of creative forces.³⁴ Interestingly, Feng Zikai independently translated Hakuson's *Symbols of Depression* and had it published by China's biggest publishing house the Commercial Press in March, 1925, three months after the release of Lu Xun's translation. Following the causal

³⁰ Zha Mingjian, Xie Tianzhen, *Zhongguo 20 shiji waiguo wenxue fanyi shi* (A History of the 20th century Foreign Literary Translation in China) (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007), 263.

³¹ Ibid., 265.

³² Lü Cheng, "Yishu yu meiyu [Art and aesthetic education]." *Jiaoyu zazhi*, 14:10 (1922): 1-8.

³³ For the influence of Hakuson's literary criticism in China, see Kudō Takamasa, *Chūgoku goken ni okeru Kuriyagawa Hakuson genshō: ryūsei, suitai, kaiki to keizoku*.

³⁴ Lu Xun, preface to *Symbols of Depression* (Beijing: xinchao she, 1924).

formula laid out in *Symbols of Depression*, many contemporaries would argue that it was through the admiration of childlikeness that Feng Zikai discovered the remedy needed to overcome traumatic experiences. Perfected fit into the discursive context of the childlikeness, Feng Zikai's art was, therefore, used by the commentator who denounced Tao Yuanqing's design as a counterexample for being easily comprehensible, and, hence, beautiful.³⁵

Widely embraced as the height of artistic subjectivity, the cult of childlikeness did not work in Tao Yuanqing's favor. He undercuts the inevitable idealism associated with the cult by first doing completely away with the image of the actual child, and second by displaying an undercraftedness that could hardly be considered beautiful even by the most lenient believer in the union between intended clumsiness and aesthetic beauty. Feng Zikai himself, however, was a great admirer of Tao Yuanqing's work and owned his paintings. As noted in Chapter 1 and above, he saw in Tao Yuanqing's abstraction the possibility of visual representation that could parallel the non-representational art of music and calligraphy. Yet there was an uncomfortable complexity in Tao Yuanqing's work. While Tao Yuanqing was esteemed as the spokesperson for the romanticists and he produced art seemingly in keeping with the period's aesthetic ideals, his work also undermines the reasons for which he was admired by Feng Zikai and the alike.

3.3 Perception over Judgment

The frustration with Tao Yuanqing's work ultimately arose from the lack of an interpretive category for abstraction. The amateurish touch seen in his cover designs were often

³⁵ Wu Binqing, "Reader's opinion—guanyu fengmian [On cover design]," 287-289.

taken as childlike so that it could be understood by those who found them appealing. There is, in actuality, little of the childlike in Tao Yuanqing's work. What was seen as naïve was no more than a kind of conscientious de-skilling. In defense of Tao Yuanqing's seeming lack of sophistication, one critic attempted to explain the beauty of abstraction vis-à-vis the realism of photography. According to him, the difference between photography and painting is the trace of the artist's distinctive self-expression. Photography is true to nature, whereas painting reflects the creative self. To paint in the realist manner is worthless because it would be nothing but color photography, only never as realistic as photography. One of Tao Yuanqing's paintings depicts a balloon seller in such a fanciful manner as if the seller himself was about to take flight with the balloons. Such a depiction opens up one's imagination.³⁶ The critic's logic resonated with the period's most influential aesthetician Zhu Guangqian's 朱光潛 (1897-1986) conceptualization of beauty. What beauty entailed for him was precisely the difference between photography and painting. He believed that in painting, one senses the presence of the artist, while photography is only true to nature. Artistic beauty must reside beyond the observable world.³⁷ For Zhu Guangqian, the metric for good art was the degree by which it transcended reality, especially a reality of turmoil and strife. Zhu Guangqian's early aesthetic formulation reinforced the transcendental nature of art popularized by Lu Xun's translations of Hakuson's *Symbols of Depression* and *Out of the Ivory Tower*.

³⁶ He, "Kanle lida xinhua Liu Haisu geren sange zhanlanhui hou [Thoughts after viewing three exhibitions]." *Beixin banyuekan*, 2:6 (1928): 111-116.

³⁷ Zhu Guangqian, "Wu yan zhi mei [Ineffable beauty]." *Minduo Monthly*, 5:5 (1924): 1-12.

Although failing to meet the expectation of childlikeness, Tao Yuanqing's art seems to have fulfilled a literary ideal popular during the period, namely, the concept of *ganxing* and *jingjie*. The artist's friend, the writer Zhong Jingwen recalled the only time that Tao Yuanqing spoke of his own art, "there is nothing deep [in my work], I just want to express a kind of *ganxing* or *jingjie* harmoniously, beautifully, and truthfully."³⁸ It was not by accident that Tao Yuanqing described his work using these terms, both unarguably the most popular terms in literary criticism of the 1920s. *Ganxing* has a long history in Chinese poetry and can be loosely translated as "the experience of being stirred up by the surroundings." *Jingjie*, a term closely related to *ganxing*, also defies translation because it was never clearly defined in Chinese and could be applied to many contexts. The term was originally the Chinese counterpart for the Sanskrit word *viṣaya*, a general term for the object of a sensory consciousness. A distinction was made between objects perceived by *viññāna* (the five senses: sight, smell, hearing, taste, and touch) and the objects perceived by the mental consciousness (*manovijñāna*).³⁹

This Buddhist term *jingjie* was brought into fashion by the modern scholar and poet Wang Guowei 王國維 (1877-1927) in his literary criticism *Remarks on Poetry in the Human World* (*Renjian cihua* 人間詞話) first published in 1910. It was subsequently embraced and elaborated by numerous aestheticians such as the aforementioned Lü Cheng and Zhu Guangqian.

³⁸ Zhong Jingwen, "Mr. Tao Yuanqing." *Yiban*, 9:2 (1929): 268.

³⁹ For more on the definition, see Robert E. Buswell et al, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), definition of *viṣaya*, *manovijñāna* 981; 968.

According to Wang Guowei, *jingjie* pertains to the state in which, even when a poem only describes scenery, the emotion is present in the description (elaborated below).⁴⁰

Despite the lack of a unifying definition for the terms *jingjie* and *ganxing* and the many synonyms associated with them, by the mid-1920s, these two terms were habitually used in literary and artistic criticism. In the case of Tao Yuanqing's art, these terms seemed to carry a particular historical charge. In 1929, shortly after Tao Yuanqing's death, the literary journal *Yiban* dedicated an obituary issue to the artist. Among the fourteen contributors, only four were painters, including Tao Yuanqing's oil painting teacher Chen Baoyi, his colleague Qian Juntao, and students Liang Yaonan and Wang Zhaoqian. Shen Binglian and Chen Xiaokong were two musician friends of the artist. Most commemorators belonged to a group of influential writers and educators in the romantic tradition.⁴¹ These like-minded intellectuals, including Feng Zikai, Ye Shengtao, Zhu Guangqian, co-founded the Lida School in Shanghai in 1925. The school exemplified the mission of aesthetic education by embracing a liberal arts curricula focusing on literature, music, and painting.⁴² Tao Yuanqing served as a painting teacher at Lida from 1926 to 1928. Ye Shengtao 葉聖陶 (1894-1988) (Ye Shaojun), colleague of Tao Yuanqing at the school,

⁴⁰ Adele Austin Rickett, *Wang Kuo-Wei's Jen-Chien Tz'u-Hua: A Study in Chinese Literary Criticism* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1977), 24.

⁴¹ I use the *romantic* in a broad sense echoing what Walter Pater regards as "an ever-present, an enduring principle, in the artistic temperament; and the qualities of thought and style which that, and other similar uses of the word romantic really indicated, are indeed but symptoms of a very continuous and widely working influence." See Walter Pater, "Postscript," in Harold Bloom, ed., *Selected Writings of Walter Pater* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 210.

⁴² The school essentially advocated a Plato-inspired academic environment that fostered open discussion and free expression. For more on the school's establishment and mission, see Liu Chen, *Lida xueyuan shilun* [Historical Studies on the Lida School] (Beijing: Tuanjie chubanshe, 2009).

describes the *jingjie* in Tao Yuanqing's work as something that provides repose for the viewer.

He writes:

The paintings by Mr. Tao, such as *Fallen Flowers*, *A Glimpse*, *Graveyard*, *The Balloon Seller*, *Remnant of the Yingtian Pagoda*, I like them all. I like them simply because I feel comfortable looking at them. His work can be appreciated by the almost blind and ignorant as well as commended by the well-educated, isn't this the ideal *jingjie* in the artistic achievement? Mr. Tao's painstaking studies led him into this *jingjie*.⁴³

A staunch proponent of the notion "literature for life," Ye Shengtao uses *jingjie* to define the function that artistic creation should perform, namely, something to soothe one's feelings. Ye Shengtao's observation is representative of the romantics' conceptualization of art's function, an opinion influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer's view on art as providing aesthetic contemplation that helps escape worldly concerns. The convictions "art for life" or "literature for life" were developed as an extension of what Wang Guowei proposed to be the ultimate goal of artistic creation. It was a reaction against the didacticism and moralism of the literary style in the late Qing/early Republican years and a strong disbelief in the cultivation of sentimentality that led Wang Guowei to embrace a more intuitive approach to literature influenced by Schopenhauer's views on art.

If one compares what Wang Guowei appropriates to be *jingjie* with the kind of "nothing so deep in meaning" (indicating the priority of the senses rather than interpretation) and "comforting" appeal to a large public claimed by Ye Shengtao and to some extent by Tao Yuanqing himself, one realizes that the literary *jingjie* described by Wang Guowei is not so

⁴³ Ye Shaojun, "Zhuiyi Tao xiansheng [Remembering Mr. Tao]." *Yiban*, 9:2 (1929): 249.

easily translatable into the realm of visual art. In comment seven in *Renjian cihua*, Wang Guowei identifies the personified description of nature as one prime expression of *jingjie*:

‘Red apricot blossoms along the branch, spring feelings stir.’ With the one word ‘stir’ (nao) the *jingjie* of the poem is completely expressed. ‘As the moon breaks through the clouds, flowers play with their shadows.’ With that one word ‘play’ (nong) the *jingjie* of the poem is completely expressed.⁴⁴

The verbs “stir” and “play” animate the otherwise static description of nature, adding more playfulness and liveliness to the senses. Unlike verbs such as “blossom” and “break through” that denote mechanical movement, “stir” and “play” express an imagined energy that is reflected onto nature by the poet’s subjective vision. Chinese painting had always shared the goal of animating nature with poetry. To achieve spirit resonance or to translate energy and vitality into the painted form is the first and foremost principle in classical Chinese painting. China has a long history of painting nature not as one sees it, but as convention prescribes it, especially for something as elusive as the notion of vitality. The most important aspect of Wang Guowei’s notion of *jingjie* is the ability to impart vitality or energy onto works of art. One observes a parallel aesthetic hierarchy evinced by writers with respect to painting.

The *jingjie* that distinguished Tao Yuanqing’s work is thus his ability to express movement. The writer He Yubo 賀玉波 (1896-1982) describes them as having a “graceful brushwork technique that contains an active movement (*dong*).” He writes:

The subject matter of *Outside the Train Window* suffices to surprise the viewer; its color is so elegant and its brushwork so lively that the viewer could, by looking at the painting, feel like being inside of a train himself, glimpsing out at the fast-changing landscape.

⁴⁴ “紅杏枝頭春意鬧，著一‘鬧’字，而境界全出。云破月來花弄影，著一‘弄’字，而境界全出矣。” Wang Guowei, *Renjian cihua* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1998), comment 7. I use Rickett’s translation of the comment, see Rickett, 42.

The tone of *The Balloon Seller* again has an elegant taste. It seems that if the strings tying the balloons were cut, they could really float and fly to the sky.⁴⁵

The popular novelist Zhao Jingshen 趙景深 (1902-1985) resonates with He Yubo and adds a more complex movement versus stasis contrast in his criticism:

Mr. Tao's paintings are extremely capable of expressing sentiment, especially the 'clear distinction between motion and stasis (dong jing fen ming)' and I am not sure if it is appropriate. In *The Balloon Seller*, everything is circular, floating as if wishing to become sages. He painted *City and Tower [Remains of the Burnt Yingtian Pagoda]* as well and they also express the sense of movement despite the immobility of what is depicted. As for *Graveyard*, which is entirely composed of squares and subdued color, it is simple and honest, and makes one suddenly feel the serenity.⁴⁶

The sense of movement or mobility that He Yubo and Zhao Jingshen felt in Tao Yuanqing's treatment of immobile objects is not unlike the personified verbs that imbue liveliness in the verses quoted by Wang Guowei. The sensitivity to movement was likewise conceived as the ultimate difference between photography and painting during the 1920s. Although agreeing with Zhu Guangqian's endorsement of painting as more beautiful than photography, the aesthetician and champion of the *yijing* notion (a variant of *jingjie*) Zong Baihua 宗白華 (1897-1986), for instance, denies photography as true to nature precisely because it fails to capture the constant movement of nature. The truth of nature lies in its unpredictable and uninterrupted state of flux. Greatly inspired by the French sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840-1917), he quotes from the artist, "it is the artist who is truthful and it is photography which lies, for in reality time does not stop, and if the artist succeeds in producing the impression of a

⁴⁵ He Yubo, "Yi huajia Tao Yuanqing xiansheng [Remembering painter Tao Yuanqing]." *Yiban*, 9:2 (1929): 271.

⁴⁶ Zhao Jingshen, "Ai Tao Yuanqing xiansheng [Grieving Mr. Tao Yuanqing]." *Yiban*, 9:2 (1929): 264.

movement which takes several moments for accomplishment, his work is certainly much less conventional than the scientific image, where time is abruptly suspended."⁴⁷ Painting and sculpture must condense the action of several moments into a single figure. The viewer should have the illusion of beholding the movement performed. What he sees is both the disappearing trace of the preceding moment and the shadow of the next moment.⁴⁸

Rodin's definition of sculpture's medium specificity amounts to defense of the medium vis-à-vis the threat posed by instantaneous photography emerging around this time. Zong Baihua was attracted to Rodin's formulation because it resonated with the attention to latent energy, a feature that had always been an important part of Chinese painting. *Jingjie* already suggested a temporal-spatial condition in the term's earlier Buddhist incarnation. It is all the more appropriate to designate with it the ability to render motion in static mediums such as painting and sculpture. Certain psychological charges arise once one's sensory perception is tricked by a work of art. The abovementioned commentators invariably noticed the strong sense of motion and energy in Tao Yuanqing's painting, but no one was able to articulate how the artist achieved such appealing effect, and they were deeply aware of this explanatory inadequacy. The writer Zhong Jingwen acknowledged that although many admire his work, few could really spell out why they are good. He also mentioned that a Japanese critic, upon viewing Tao Yuanqing's paintings, claimed that his work "exudes grace and spirit (*piaoyi qiyun*)."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Auguste Rodin, *Rodin on Art and Artists* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2009), 34.

⁴⁸ Zong Baihua, "Kanle Luodan diaoke yihou [After seeing Rodin's sculptures]," in *Yijing*, 27-33.

⁴⁹ Zhong Jingwen, 266.

It is difficult to garner what the critic actually meant by ascribing the time-honored qualities such as *yi* and *qiyun* to Tao Yuanqing's painting. The aspirational qualities suggested by *yi* (untrammelled) and *qiyun* (spirit resonance) were rarely applied to describe non-Chinese style works of art. To ascribe to Tao Yuanqing's Western-style watercolors and oil paintings such descriptors is to acknowledge his transcending boundaries between ink painting and Western-style painting. His fellow colleague Qian Juntao once observed that one cannot always tell whether some of Yuanqing's paintings were done in water color or oil, and naturally it is not obvious whether it is in the Chinese or Western-style, because he is dedicated to convey a certain *yijing*..."⁵⁰ When applied to literature, *jingjie* were exclusively used for literary criticism on works of the past by Wang Guowei and other literary scholars. To transpose the literary concept into criticism of contemporary art unavoidably encountered difficulties. Painting and writing each have their own means and habits to evoke movement and latent energy. In poetry, as shown above in the two verses by two poets from the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), the poets play with choice of words and rhyming scheme. The painter must convey a certain sentiment via his brushwork, use of color, and other pictorial devices. The commentators' descriptive inadequacy cautions us against measuring Tao Yuanqing's work using any conventional, prescribed paradigms, and simultaneously begs for a new kind of descriptive language that can fully bear out Tao Yuanqing's painterly virtuosity. We are fortunate to have reproductions of his most celebrated paintings including *The Balloon Seller*, *A Glimpse, Outside of the Car Window*, and *Fallen Flowers*; and, in my opinion, despite the lack of the originals, these

⁵⁰ Qian Juntao, "Tao Yuanqing lun [On Tao Yuanqing]." *Yiban*, 9:2 (1929): 288.

reproductions could nonetheless help explain the key technical aspects that blur the boundaries between different mediums and demonstrate the unique elements that yield the grace and energy felt by many.

3.4 'Motion Picture'

Although we can no longer look upon its original colors today, this monochrome version of *The Balloon Seller* was in fact a result of Tao Yuanqing's own discretion (figure 3.13). The writer Ye Shengtao, editor for the *Short Story Monthly* then, became acquainted with the artist over the process of creating the printing plate for his painting *The Balloon Seller* to be included as a plate in one issue of the literary magazine. The publisher originally planned to print it using three-color printing, but each time they tried, the color was less than satisfactory. While supervising the proofs of the plate, Tao Yuanqing was disappointed by the color quality and decided to use one plate that was entirely colored in pink by mistake.⁵¹

Since it was only through print that paintings could be published and circulated, it seems inevitable that artists of the 1920's would presuppose the double life of their works. They gradually realized that they needed to conceive of their works from early on as both painted and printed. Tao Yuanqing once remarked that for him there existed only two types of colors, those that print well and those that do not.⁵² Rather than seeing Tao Yuanqing's embracing of the accident as a decision made out of desperation, it was perhaps a common condition that

⁵¹ Ye Shaojun, 248.

⁵² Xu Qinwen, "Tao Yuanqing ji qi huihua [Tao Yuanqing and his painting]," in *Xu Qinwen sanwen ji* [Collection of Xu Qinwen's Prose] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1984), 333-341; 339-340. The essay was originally published in *Renshijian*, 24, March 20, 1935.

artists of his time had to face. As a result, the strange, pastel pink coloring even became part of the reason for the above-mentioned commentators' fascination because the color effectively imbues the picture with a surrealistic feeling suited for the whimsical motif of a balloon seller. The overall pink splash unifies the various elements in the painting, particularly the balloons and its seller and enhances the airborne tendency of the figure.

The widely noticed airborne tendency is also conveyed through a combination of visual distortions and obscure spatial construction. In the foreground, an elongated, disproportionate figure fills the entire height of the picture frame. The disproportionally small head of the figure lends an upward movement to the bloated body that leans slightly towards the balloons in the background. The detail of the pipe and the crossed-arm posture add an impression of nonchalance consistent with the lightness of the subject matter. The potted plant in both foreground and background are depicted standing at an unrealistic angle as if blown aside by the expansion of the central figure. The uneven horizontal line by the fence encloses the picture as if one is looking at it through a convex glass that bends outward so that everything appears curved to the side with an enlarged central figure and compressed edges. Tao Yuanqing leaves a ring of uneven space between the outline of the figure and the background. It is difficult to determine the original effect of this auratic contour without the colored version of the painting. One can surmise that the contoured space could be conceived as a visual device to express three-dimensionality by giving the body some volume. Even from the monochrome version, this imperfect jagged contour gives the body a glowing effect that highlights the fantastical nature of the subject. The patchy demarcation also creates a decisive breach between the figure's

bodily existence and the air around it, as if he is ready to take flight to a world unbound by the backdrop.

Other paintings such as *Outside of the Train Window* seem to be more direct challenges to the representation of movement as implied by He Yubo (figure 3.14). The painter Qian Juntao describes it as “close to the style of Cézanne, but in depicting movement, better than Cézanne.” By 1925, Paul Cézanne was regarded in the Chinese art world as the most pioneering painter who altered what had come before him and influenced generations of artists after his time. The Chinese understanding of Impressionism and Post-Impressionism relied primarily on the interpretation of English art critics such as Roger Fry and Clive Bell. Clive Bell’s “The Debt to Cézanne,” a section from *Art* (1914), for example, translated into Chinese in 1928, formed the basic view on French modernist painting for artists and critics in China.⁵³ Bell and Fry’s elevation of the pure form, its separation from the content of the works of art has its universalist appeal that attracted Chinese artists who found a channel to enjoy works by Cézanne without much background in European history and art history. Labels such as childlike, purity, and genius given by the formalist canonization of Cézanne also resonated with the aesthetic tendencies existing in China. (A similar admiration of Auguste Rodin, discussed below, is another example of the English influence.) Since Clive Bell insisted on simplification and design being the paramount factors in painting, the adoration of Cézanne also brought about an awareness of design among Chinese artists.⁵⁴

⁵³ Sun Xingyu, trans. “The Debt to Cézanne.” *Yaboluo* (Apollo), 6 (1929): 58-65.

⁵⁴ Sun Xingyu, trans. “Simplification and Design.” *Yaboluo* (Apollo), 3 (1928): 54-64.

Cézanne was introduced as a painter who ended art as an imitation of nature and created simplified and personalized paintings of his own vision. The deep appreciation of Cézanne's work was expressed by the Harvard trained scholar Zhang Xinhai (Chang Hsin-hai) when he acclaimed that sometimes Cézanne's painting has only a few simple strokes, but what is depicted seems alive, as if rising from the picture to become something sculpted.⁵⁵ In addition to the literary fascination with *jingjie*, Tao Yuanqing's work was also appreciated for its liveliness and dynamism the same way as Cézanne was worshipped.

Although the lack of color reduces the readability of what is being depicted in *Outside of the Train Window*, one can make out, as the title implies, the painter's attempt to capture the fleeting impression of what one sees from the window of a moving vehicle (unclear if it is from a car or a train window). The speed blurs vision, what one sees through the window is reduced to an impression collapsed from many slightly different impressions as revealed to the eye at each successive moment. What Tao Yuanqing was trying to depict was this vision in motion. Two figures walk along the pavement, and the constant shifting position of the subject inside the vehicle disintegrates the figure and reduces their bodily masses into two flat, tapering, and elongated silhouettes over the course of their receding glide. In the next glance, perhaps, these tilted, compressed shapes will merge with and dissolve into the indistinct background. What is left to attest to their substance are the thin shadows they cast on the ground and the austere Cézannesque outlines.

⁵⁵ Zhang Xinhai, "Houqi yinxiangpai huajia saishangnu de yishu [The art of the Post-impressionist Cézanne]." *Chenbao Fukan*, 9, January 14, 1925.

A Glimpse is another pictorial conceit between vision and visibility (figure 3.15). Qian Juntao explained that people usually do not notice this painting because the colors are too light. One can only vaguely distinguish the shapes of houses, trees, and paths. The colors are not only faint, but also very close in hue to each other so that no contrast is there to help distinguish features or establish any sense of space. In the foreground, or the bottom half, of the painting, a few irregular shaped planes intersect with color patches. Some areas of colors have a contour drawn around them while others overflow their outlines. There are also contours that do not outline any color. One is made to realize that outline is pure invention. The outlined areas do not necessarily have more representational value than the free-floating strokes appearing all over the painting. The colors are sober, with pale red and ochre playing against even paler blue and green. No form is fully articulate. The whole picture is enshrouded in a veil of mist, a haziness produced by a layer of extremely light yellow wash that covers the background or the top half of the painting. A few puzzling, yellow and orange curved lines seem to indicate hilltops in the distance. Certain areas around these curved lines are left unpainted. The orange curve in the center of the painting stands out because it is illuminated by the unpainted areas surrounding it. *A Glimpse* depicts the effect of sunshine flitting across the air, so bright that it bleaches the colors out of the landscape and dissolves its form into dust and particles. The many free-floating, dancing lines and colors capture the glow emanating from rays of light, a hardly visible vision that one sees by not quite seeing. A fleeting glance of a scintillating glow becomes the subject to meditate upon.

This challenge to depict motion was often met in mediums such as film and photography at the time. While the ability to convey liveliness had always been a key measure

of good painting, such overt experimentation with the depiction of movement in watercolor was unprecedented. It seems that Chinese painters could relate more to the mute style of Cézanne than the agitated depiction of movement embraced by, for example, the Futurist painters during the 1910s and 1920s. Unlike Futurist painters who used divisionist techniques to convey the dynamism of movement reflected in the feelings and sensations experienced in time, Tao Yuanqing prefers to render a single static moment that could be imagined as the aggregate of the constant flow of motion and energy over a short period of time. For the Futurist painters, the intensified visual and psychological experiences could be manifested via broken planes, vibrant colors, forceful lines, multiplied limbs and wheels. The number of lines and planes is, however, always limited in a painting, and thus, rather than multiplying the moving object, an economical painter like Tao Yuanqing used as few brushstrokes as possible to evoke what is *not* directly depicted. Painting can never replicate the movement per se, but only convey the sensation of it. The intensity of motion could really only be expressed through an attempt to suppress motion in pictorial terms. The painting began to take its shape as soon as the artist had wrestled his vision and sensation into quietude. The resulting image, for contemporary Chinese viewers, appeared bizarrely lyrical, and quite comforting despite its rather nondescript nature. Accustomed to the overall aesthetics of Chinese ink painting, the writer He Yubo and Zhao Jingshen observed a similar elegance and liveliness in Tao Yuanqing's watercolors, despite their departure from conventionality.

The difficulty of faithfully reproducing the surface texture and color of a painting in print limited Tao Yuanqing's expressive possibility in book cover designs. The problem remained when his paintings were being reproduced in journals and catalogues. While the

haphazard pink print of *The Balloon Seller* and the anecdote behind it are valuable, it would also be enlightening to retrieve the aspects lost in reproduction. But the limitation, in turn, forced the artist to be creative about his brushwork in order to make up for the loss caused by technological barriers. What amazed the first viewers of Tao Yuanqing's art, for example Qian Daosun, was precisely his economy of ink and brush in his cover design *Symbols of Depression* and *Big Red Robe*, to the extent that not a single stroke needed to be added or subtracted. Emoting over his art, like He Yubo and Zhao Jingshen, Qian was possessed by a strong sense of tranquility. Economical brushwork alone, however, does not deliver a sense of tranquility. Returning to his watercolors, sobriety is the result of many factors, including color palette, linear quality, and spatial construction. The rare color reproduction of one of his other watercolors *Fallen Flowers* preserves, to a degree, the artist's virtuosic handling of the medium.

His watercolor *Fallen Flowers* initiated the project of the popular *Short Story Monthly* to reproduce important contemporary paintings on the frontispiece of each issue starting from January, 1928 (figure 3.16). The frontispiece was accompanied by an introduction by Feng Zikai. Consistent with Feng's romantic view of art, he downplayed the intentionality of artistic creation and placed painterly elements as the key to creating a beautiful artwork. He equated the charm of Tao Yuanqing's painting with the beauty of music and calligraphy, both envisioned as a result of artistic invention rather than the direct observation of nature. Tao Yuanqing did not only experiment with motifs, such as a moving vehicle, lending themselves well to the representation of motion, he also engaged in genres that were less prone to motion.

Against a subdued, blue-washed background, Tao Yuanqing paints a quiet still-life, described by Qian Juntao as "a small still-life with a withered, big red flower in an ordinary

wine jar, its subject matter simple and modest.”⁵⁶ But the painter cannot help but notice the unusual technique that distinguishes this painting from a commonplace still-life. Qian Juntao remarked that, instead of the regular approach of applying infinite gradated colors from the lightest to the darkest in order to create a sense of three-dimensionality, Tao Yuanqing leaves most areas of the jar unpainted, adding only crisp, sharp-edged lines to define the most highlighted area, thus creating the effect of a highly reflective surface. In watercolor, forms are modeled through the contrast of neighboring colors and variation in hue is achieved by adjusting the amount of water mixed with the pigment. As a result, the medium eliminates the primacy of lines, with colors allowed to seep into each other to create murky areas that collapse the layering, a process impossible in oil painting.

While respecting the properties of watercolor, Tao Yuanqing also subverts the medium’s properties by adding dark outlines using traditional brushwork in black ink. The small fish bowl in *Fallen Flowers* is outlined with crisp brushwork while the contour of the big wine jar is overdrawn with thick, less defined lines in blue with a light tinge of black. The unexpected heavy and cloudy outline of the wine jar seems out of place when compared with other areas in and around the wine jar where the artist exerted less control over the properties of watercolor, letting the colors seeping into each other (for example, the green of the flower’s stem takes on both the blue hue and the unpainted paleness of the background). Around the loosely painted red petals, Tao Yuanqing draws highly inflected, knife-sharp black lines that contrast starkly with the soft daubs of red that they are meant to enclose.

⁵⁶ Qian Juntao, 289.

The artist already plays in a similar manner with outlines in *A Glimpse*. In *Fallen Flowers*, too, while some lines encircle the red petals, others do not function so much as contours, but as highlights animating the overall quietude of the still-life. The misalignment endows the petals with a sense of weight and motion as one imagines them swaying and falling to the table. Movement and energy are also suggested by way of contrast. He managed to imply a passage of time, however short, with a jarring visual effect generated by the misalignment between black outline and color infill. Amid the translucent blue hues, the heavy-handed outline grants the large wine jar a much more illuminated presence than any other objects in the painting. While such paintings were habitually given the default title *jingwu*, the direct translation of still-life into Chinese, Tao Yuanqing chose a classic poetic name for his painting, *Fallen Flowers* (*Luo hong*).

One has only to compare Tao Yuanqing's still-life with that by another painter Jiang Xiaojian to appreciate the difference (figure 3.17). Three months later, the same *Short Story Monthly* reproduced a still-life by the sculptor and painter Jiang Xiaojian 江小鶴 (1894-1939). The French trained sculptor offered a very different kind of painting. It shows a vase filled with lush, assorted blooming flowers of varied colors and shapes. The overall composition, especially the clean, divided background is reminiscent of Vincent van Gogh's characteristic still-life of flowers in a vase. Whereas Van Gogh typically draws the loose line dividing ground and background close to the bottom frame of the picture, Jiang Xiaojian flattens the picture plane by almost bisecting the ground and background with bold gold paint on the bottom half to contrast with a dull grey on top. There are no loosely drawn lines, the two planes are seamlessly joined as one. No illusion of spatial recession is attempted. The space is an artifice

and is as flat as the painted surface itself. Jiang Xiaojian had no interest in rendering motion in pictorial terms. He attempted to render the still-life as timeless as it should be. The desire to create an appearance of fine finish limited its expressive possibility. The critics, especially those influenced by Wang Guowei's aesthetic theories, were more drawn to Tao Yuanqing's approach to render motion than Jiang Xiaojian's persistent *nature-morte*. They preferred the ephemerality of the falling petals to the robust, ever-lasting blossoms. An achieved painter, designer, and sculptor, Jiang Xiaojian was more interested in pure decorativeness in painting and design than conjuring *jingjie*.

Coda: Figure, Figuration, and Reconfiguration

However *jingjie* was thought to play out in Tao Yuanqing's time-conscious paintings, they were to be exclusively reserved for his paintings and not his designs in which, as I will reveal, he actually employed similar techniques resulting in a more poignant visual effect. The indescribable literary ideal seems to be the result of a combination of his characteristic painterly treatments, such as contour misalignments, idiosyncratic outlines, use of unpainted and negative space, sensibility to color variations, and askew spatial construction. There exist no discursive content or topical references embedded in his work, but there are evocative images that trigger reactions. Despite the positive reviews from the literary circle, Tao Yuanqing is not exactly the writers' best friend. He was undoubtedly thought to have given expression to the ambivalent *jingjie* and *ganxing* in visual terms, and he played with certain poetic motifs over which it was easy and ready for writers to emote. Yet he was not so romantic and tender in his approach to painting and design as the writers believed.

Tao Yuanqing produced a small literary output, which he published in *Apollo*, the institutional monthly journal of the Hangzhou National Art Academy, where he served as instructor of design until his death in 1929. In one piece, he recounts how a certain non-smoking Mr. B acquires a pack of Beauty Brand cigarettes from a girl in a restaurant. The writing labors over silly and boring details of how Mr. B, while eating a delicious meal, is interrupted by a girl who tries to sell him cigarettes. After a few rounds of gentle refusal, Mr. B finally gives in and buys a pack of cigarettes. The piece ends with the interlocutor asking Mr. B why he finally bought the cigarettes. “Not to disappoint the girl, obviously,” replies Mr. B.⁵⁷

The seeming promise of suspense suggested at the story’s beginning and the detailed build-up that follows amount to nothing but an anticlimactic platitude in the end. The reader is left with little to contemplate and is likely to question why such a story was worthy of publishing at all. Yet the text ends with an interesting note on Mr. B’s unwillingness to disappoint, while the story itself seems to, in fact, be an elaborate attempt to disappoint and thwart expectation. To treat such banal material with mock seriousness is to reveal the arbitrariness of expectation by going against such psychology. In an even more daring short poem, he ridicules again certain expectations one routinely assumes of a literary or artistic work:

白雲回答我說：
‘我們自己也不知道’
爭先恐後地。

White clouds say to me in response,
‘We ourselves don’t know either,’

⁵⁷ Tao Yuanqing, “B jun he meili pai xiangyan [Mr. B and beauty brand cigarettes].” *Yaboluo* (Apollo), 8 (1932): 69-70.

The three-line poem intentionally omits the assumed “why question” that “I (me)” ask the clouds. The omission mockingly indicates that it matters little what question is actually posed. The choice of white clouds as personified addressee is absurd. The “we ourselves” indicates the question posed concerns the nature of the white clouds as if they were purposeful and determined in being what they are. Tired of questions such as “what does it mean” and “why do you paint like this,” Tao Yuanqing took on a reactionary voice in his absurd literary work to reveal the equally absurd expectations that a work of art was made to fulfill.

Far from being subservient to popular literary ideals, the images Tao Yuanqing created are themselves productive and constitutive of senses and thoughts. They are capable of provoking basic sensory reactions that are not easily parsed. It is convenient to speak of his work as expressing a certain *jingjie* since the connotation of the term itself was ambiguous. In his literary output, one senses the discreet contempt for such romanticization of his art. The aesthetic romanticists had little to say about Tao Yuanqing’s book designs except that they were attractive and innovative. While the saturated belief of aesthetic intuition garnered appraisal for Tao Yuanqing’s work, his sharp-edged transformation of conventionalities in Chinese art evaded available discursive contexts.

Veiled under decorativeness, his designs work on the cutting edge. The cover design he made for Xu Qinwen’s 1928 book *Much Ado About Nothing* (*Ruo you qi shi*, 若有其事) is entirely created out of wedges varying in length and curvature (figure 3.18). Not an exception to his

⁵⁸ Tao Yuanqing, “Xisha [Fine Sand].” *Yaboluo* (Apollo), 3 (1928): 64.

preference for figural motifs, in this design, the shape of a figure with a bent back seems to emerge amid the ensemble of wedges. The base color of the wedges alternates between red and yellow, upon which exaggerated black accents are added to deliver a thrashing dynamism that is further dramatized by Tao Yuanqing's idiosyncratic rough and uneven edges. This basic vocabulary developed out from the kind of misalignment discussed above in his watercolor *Fallen Flowers* in which contours do not align with the fallen petals that they mean to enclose. On the cover of *Much Ado About Nothing*, he simply carried the misalignment one step further by layering what would have been black outlines over color infills.

To collapse outline and infill, a technique that was traditionally associated with figure painting in East Asia, represents a radically different conceptualization of lines. Aesthetic principles always manifested through the quality of lines. Elegant flowing lines had been admired for their ethereal and weightless quality since the time of Gu Kaizhi 顧愷之 (344-406), master of early figure paintings. Lines imbued with vital forces were thought to participate in the flux of the world, reflecting the idea of embeddedness. Tao Yuanqing's contempt for the outline and infill technique freed the lines from performing the task of delineation and containment. The harsh-edged, dancing contours/highlights no longer signify enclosure or embeddedness, but a tendency towards suspension and expansion.

So deeply seated are they in the Chinese painting tradition, lines have been recurrently mobilized to *connect* with the past at different historical intersections. The paramount linear style is known as *baimiao* (plain-ink drawing), a pictorial technique that exclusively relies on the expressive possibilities of linear element to convey form while eschewing ink wash, tonal gradation, and the use of color. The technique was associated with the Northern Song painter Li

Gonglin 李公麟 (1049-1106) and subsequently became a dominant style in Buddhist painting.⁵⁹

In the late Ming, painters such as Ding Yunpeng 丁雲鵬 (1547-1628) and Chen Hongshou resorted to this crisp, archaic linear style as a means to express contemporary commitment (albeit with a touch of humor) to the dharma, a commitment that had been culturally embedded in the *baimiao* style.⁶⁰ The careful and delicate delineation assumed of the *baimiao* style is conducive to rendering likeness and thus calls attention to the presence of the figures. Yet, while using low saturation of ink, such pristine linear figurations can become so pale that the presence dilutes into a ghostly apparition, hence the name *wangliang hua* (apparition painting) to designate such paintings. Whether presence or apparition, the key property that renders such impression possible is the interaction between ink lines and the blank painting ground.

When the figures are delineated with saturated ink and rendered fully volumetric, one tends to read the blank ground as perpendicular to the painted figure, so the figure appears to be standing or sitting on the ground. Conversely, the blank ground would appear parallel to the figure when pale ink is used, as if the ghostly figure would quickly dissolve into the world of matter behind it. Despite Tao Yuanqing's radical departure from traditional ways of conceptualizing lines, his experience with the graphic medium only made him more sensitive to new potentials generated by the figure-ground interaction. Comparable to the collapsing of the outline and infill differentiation, he conceives of the lines not as enclosing and modulating the

⁵⁹ On the *baimiao* technique and Buddhist painting, see Yukio Lippit, "Apparition Painting." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, 55/56 (Spring-Autumn, 2009): 61-86.

⁶⁰ Richard K. Kent, "Ding Yunpeng's Baimiao Lohans: A Reflection of Late Ming Lay Buddhism." *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University* 63 (2004): 62-89.

figure, but as markers of a particular time-space configuration. This is the visual device that underlies what felt like latent energy in his paintings and designs.

On the cover design for *Butterfly* (*Hudie* 蝴蝶), yet another book by Xu Qinwen, a figure is depicted, amidst lush vegetation, beholding a white butterfly (figure 3.19). The gentle figure is carved out of eleven, strong directional and fluid lines. The figure's existence relies on the exact positioning of each line, so animated that one can imagine them, at the next moment, moving apart to reconfigure something else. We are granted, through an alcove opening, a rare vision of a fleeting apparition of a butterfly spirit—an impression not created through the dilution of color as in ink painting, but through the sheer dynamism of lines. The quality of lines in the butterfly spirit is similar to that in the flute player-goddess decorating the cover of *Bailu*, and to the nude, dormant female on the cover of *Symbols of Depression*, the first book cover design Tao Yuanqing ever made. But here, lines, and only lines are entrusted to embody the elemental forces that generate the figuration.

In the paintings discussed above, Tao Yuanqing primarily explored the extremity and diversity of vision through blurriness. In print, such nebulous forms would be inconvenient. The power of his designs, therefore, derives from visionary clarity—a clarity expressed through the economy and quality of the lines. The primacy of linearity connects Tao Yuanqing's art with East Asia's past by way of disconnection and misalignment. Beyond such literal disconnection and misalignment, he also renewed our engagement with old themes and introduced new ones by counteracting our expectations—the flute player no longer playing her flute, the balloon seller departing with his balloons. Much more methodical than what the ambiguous term *jingjie*

may imply, he must posit a balance between vision and representation, painting and print, a world in flux and distilled clarity.

Chapter Four

Spellbound: Roots, Ruins, and Surface

Introduction: Tale Gone Awry

On one rare occasion, Tao Yuanqing substituted his painting tools for the writing pen and reworked an episode from the popular White Snake legend. The folklore tells the story of the White Snake spirit disguised as a beautiful woman who falls in love with a young scholar. Their human affection and happiness are threatened by the Buddhist monk Fa Hai who seeks to exorcise the spirit. White Snake, punished for thus violating the boundary between human and nonhuman, was forever imprisoned by the monk under the Leifeng Pagoda in Hangzhou. The ending of the story changed over time. Monk Fa Hai's upholding of human relationships and social norms gradually lost its allure among common people, and, in the Qing dynasty, the moving love story between White Snake and the scholar eventually triumphed over the ruthlessness of the ruling authoritative power. The symbolic value of White Snake also underwent numerous transformations over time, from a folk demon to a modernist femme fatale, from a female warrior to a female activist propagating social reform.¹ During the early 20th century, the destructive power of the female spirit once more lay at the center of Chinese literary imagination.

¹ For the historical transformation of the White Snake legend, see Liang Luo, "A White Snake in Beijing: Re-creating Socialist Opera," in *The Avant-Garde and the Popular in China: Tian Hua and the Intersection of Performance and Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan press, 2014), 177-212. Also see Eugene Y. Wang, "Tope and Topos: The Leifeng Pagoda and the Discourse of the Demonic," 488-552.

Posthumously published in 1932, Tao Yuanqing's adaption, however, reads like a travesty of even the wildest alteration of the story. Entitled "Fetching the Elixir," the story begins with descriptions of the couple's conjugal happiness, which ends when the scholar fatally faints upon accidentally seeing White Snake revealing her serpentine form. In order to save her husband, White Snake decides to steal the elixir from the God of Longevity, or the Old Man of the South Pole. She is pardoned for the crime by the guards and the God of Longevity himself, not because of, as one would image, her heartrending attachment to the human world and human love, but purely on the grounds of her beauty! Tao Yuanqing's story ends with White Snake's self-indulgent reflection on her appearance: "no wonder Xu Xian [White Snake's husband] treasures me so much, even the aged God of Longevity was enamored, and the guards endlessly flirted with me."²

In Tao Yuanqing's rendering, White Snake's destructive or salvational power was only skin-deep. He omitted the Buddhist monk Fa Hai and opted for White Snake's encounter with the vernacular God of Longevity. It was undoubtedly intended as a parody of the well-known folklore, subverting concerns for rational order, humanity, and salvation with self-indulgence, immodesty, and an overall playful tone. Following extended examination of his design output, one should not be surprised by his desire to suspend all master narratives. This tendency, however, is certainly more detectible and blunt in writing than how it was masqueraded in his designs.

² Tao Yuanqing, "Qu xiancao [Fetching the elixir]." *Yaboluo*, 8 (1932): 71-81.

In the past, visual art was, by definition, inextricably tied to form and appearance; it was considered a less successful medium for expressing what cannot be grasped or seen. Words, on the other hand, were already pure abstraction, like calligraphy and music, possessed of infinite possibilities for expression. Chinese literati painting, as a result, sets its goal to emulate poetry and calligraphy from its inception. Painting had to be at odds with its own limitations, constantly trying to deny the descriptive tendencies of its own medium. Their position seems to have reversed in the early 20th century as Chinese art became increasingly abstract.

The deconstructive deliberation in Tao Yuanqing's transgressive literary endeavor left little mark. His comparable effort in design, in contrast, altered the period's notion of art's function, and more precisely the meaning of abstraction. Most of his designs grace the covers of literary works dealing with grave and complex subjects such as memory, loss, and repression. His playful designs alleviated the heavy-heartedness with a decorative, yet sophisticated visual appeal. His design, dedicated to the simulation of varied surface qualities, projects an imaginary space unbound by the period's dominating interpretive rationale. His art undermined, for instance, the period's strong demand for nationalistic allegiance while also showing little attachment to the particulars of local cultures. His designs simultaneously evoked intimate imageries of childhood, female beauty, and a cosmopolitan chic premised upon public anonymity. Serving as both advertisement for the underlying literature and visual trigger for deep thoughts, his painting and design eventually overtook words in expressive capacity.

4.1 Spellbound

In an essay from 1936, Lu Xun wrote of his favorite female ghost portrayed in a theatrical performance in his hometown Shaoxing:

Naturally there is the sad sound of the trumpet. In a short while, the curtain is lifted and she appears: bright red robe, long black vest, long tousled hair, two strips of joss paper hanging from the neck. Her head lowered and her hands dangling, she walks zigzag over the whole stage... She swings back her long hair and now people make out her face: a round face white as limestone, dark eyebrows, jet black eye sockets, and blood-red lips.³

This female ghost character *nüdiao*, or Ghost of the Hanged Woman from his native Shaoxing's popular theatre performance *Mulianxi* also provided inspiration for Tao Yuanqing's painting *Big Red Robe*, made famous by its conversion to a book cover design in 1925 (figure 1). The painting was, in Lu Xun's words, "powerful with strong contrast, yet harmonious and vivid — how stunning the gesture of gripping the sword."⁴ Deeming the vengeful ghost "more beautiful and strong than all other ghosts," Lu Xun's attitude towards *nüdiao*, as Tsi-an Hsia characterizes, "was that of doting fondness."⁵ Lu Xun's description of the undeniably horrifying appearance of the female ghost is tinged with tenderness and affection. According to Lu Xun, this female ghost was so loved by the locals that she was even sanctified as a God, known as the God of Hanging.

Against the background of progress and enlightenment, irrational superstitions such as believing in ghosts and gods threatened the rule of reason. The Ghost of the Hanged Woman

³ Lu Xun, "Nüdiao," in *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 6, 621-622. The translation is based upon Tsi-an Hsia, *The Gate of Darkness*, 155.

⁴ Xu Qinwen, "Lu Xun and Tao Yuanqing," 86.

⁵ Hsia, 155.

belongs to this group. She is the ghost of women wronged in their lives and who killed themselves by hanging. The ghost can return to human life only if she finds a substitute, and so seeks out another woman and persuades her to hang herself. The vengeful spirit is noteworthy because the demonic specter of folklore literature that had been largely banished from the literati discourse made a comeback with a vengeance in the 1920s. Eugene Wang suggests that, by this time, the Chinese imaginary repertoire had been so sterilized and cleansed that the injection of the demonic aesthetic had a refreshing impact.⁶ This fascination with demons, ghosts, and revenge was not only a source of inspiration for modern authors; the highly superstition-tinted aesthetic was also, ironically, a powerful attack on what Lu Xun mockingly referred to as “progressive writers” and “revolutionary fighters” in Shanghai.

Starting from 1928, Lu Xun began to be denounced by a group of writers who studied in Japan and founded the influential Creation Society (*Chuangzao she*) in 1921. Mesmerized by the romantic Japanese authors from the Taishō period, the first incarnation of the Creation Society, represented by writers such as Tian Han 田漢 (1898-1968) and Guo Moruo, advocated the romantic liberation of the self and embraced the “art for art’s sake” philosophy. The group went through several transformations over the course of the 1920s and eventually became a staunch proponent of leftist ideology.⁷ Lu Xun was denounced as petit bourgeois and old-fashioned by members of the Creation Society.⁸ In the essay “Nüdiao,” Lu Xun made his reactionary gesture

⁶ Eugene Y. Wang, “Tope and Topos,” 522-523.

⁷ For more discussion on the Creation Society, see Tang Xiaobing, *Origins of the Chinese Avant-Garde: The Modern Woodcut Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 43-89. Tang also describes the back and forth of attacks between Lu Xun and members of the Creation Society.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

towards the revolutionary artists explicit with the “help” of foolish village women committing suicide and ghosts returning back to life in the plot of the play *Mulianxi*. “Naturally,” he writes, “suicide is cowardly and ghosts revenging is not scientific, but those are foolish women, not even literate, I hope that the ‘progressive’ man of letters and the ‘fighting’ avant-garde do not take offense.”⁹

In a similar vein, Lu Xun attacked the derivative painting styles popular among the self-labeled “progressive artists.” He lamented that contemporary art trends were completely determined by what the publishing world decided to print since foreign works of art were transmitted through the print medium. Young artists would adopt a certain style as quickly as they would abandon it. Their stylistic resemblance remained on a surface level. The devotion to cover design manifested Lu Xun’s faith in the transformative power of surface, but he also vehemently mocked those who took the surface superficially. In the visual arts field, Lu Xun tactically attacked the artist and writer Ye Lingfeng’s 葉靈鳳 (1905–1975) indiscriminate imitation of Aubrey Beardsley’s macabre, *fin-de-siècle* style by publishing a monograph of Beardsley’s work based upon Arthur Symons’ (1865–1945) monograph of the artist in 1929. The aforementioned writer and musician Tian Han had already translated Oscar Wilde’s *Salome* with 16 illustrations by Beardsley in 1922. Rather than introducing the English artist to a Chinese audience, Lu Xun’s monograph was a corrective directed at what he considered a superficial understanding of the artist.

⁹ Lu Xun, “Nüdiao,” in *Lu Xun quanji*, vol.6, 622.

In the preface, Lu Xun specifically took a passage from Symons' essay discussing the influences Beardsley received: "...[Influence from France] helped him to the pose which helped him to reveal himself; as Burne-Jones had helped him when he did the illustrations to the *Morte d'Arthur*, as Japanese art helped him to free himself from that influence, as [Keisai] Eisen and Saint-Aubin showed him the way to *The Rape of the Lock*, he had that originality which surrenders to every influence, yet surrenders to absorb, not to be absorbed; that originality which, constantly shifting, is true always to its centre."¹⁰ For Lu Xun, Ye Lingfeng's explicit imitation of Beardsley's style represented the artist's surrender to being absorbed. Lu Xun published the monograph partly as a mockery of Ye Lingfeng's unoriginality.

The subject of the sickly beauty combined with a style characterized by deep contrast between light and dark and sensuous lines provided an effective vocabulary for the artist Ye Lingfeng to visualize a dark, psychic, and romantic sensibility. His cover design and illustrations for the Creation Society writer Zhou Quanping's short story collection *Smiles in the Dreams* (*Meng li de weixiao*, 夢裡的微笑), for instance, explicitly adopted Beardsley's design vocabulary (figure 4.1). Ye Lingfeng's literary works similarly combined gothic motifs with romantic whimsy and perverse sexual psychology with decadent symbolism.¹¹ Lu Xun was, without a doubt, also attracted to the sickly beauty and the dark energy impregnated therein. His tender affection for the female ghost and unusual insistence on transforming Tao Yuanqing's painting into a cover design bear witness to his adoration. And this affection was so

¹⁰ Arthur Symons, *Aubrey Beardsley* (London: John Baker Publishers Ltd, 1966), 20. Lu Xun's preface and monograph is largely a translation based upon Symons' monograph on Beardsley.

¹¹ David Der-wei Wang, *Cambridge History of Chinese Literature*, vol. 2, 478.

deeply cherished that he could not tolerate its visual representation's reliance on an obviously borrowed style already well-established in its native England.

No one can avoid a discussion on the problems of influence during this period characterized by intense adoptions of Western arts and sciences. The originality contemporary critics saw in Tao Yuanqing's painting was often contrasted with the artist Liu Haisu's painting style, a style heavily derived from Post-impressionism. Branding himself the "rebel of art," Liu Haisu was instrumental in establishing the Shanghai Art School and became notorious after the nude-model incident discussed in Chapter 1. By 1927, the effusive Post-impressionist style began to wane in popularity and Liu Haisu's approach became outdated. Tao Yuanqing's art exhibition held in 1927 concurred with an exhibition showcasing Liu Haisu's recent work in Shanghai. After visiting both shows, a critic commended Tao Yuanqing's unique and anti-realist style while denouncing Liu Haisu's derivative approach. By 1927, it had become irrelevant to ape a style originating from Europe's past.¹² Although Tao Yuanqing was not specifically reacting against the derivative approach, he was certainly aware of its weakness, commenting discreetly that a certain gentleman imitates Western-style painting only too well.¹³ What the critic, Lu Xun, or Tao Yuanqing disapproved of was not the picking and choosing among ready-made artistic idioms as such, but the lack of a dynamic approach, essential to all art-making, that organically transforms any number of existing practices into something visually new. Tao Yuanqing, like Beardsley, took cues from what was available to him, but never surrendered to being absorbed.

¹² He, "After viewing Lida, Xinhua, and Liu Haisu's art exhibitions." *Beixin*, 2:6 (1927): 111-116.

¹³ Zhong Jingwen, "Mr. Tao Yuanqing." *Yiban*, 9 (1929): 268.

4.2 Enigma of the Big Red Robe

Charmed by the dark energy and literary potential of the female ghost, Lu Xun was delighted by Tao Yuanqing's painting *Big Red Robe* (figure 1). According to Xu Qinwen, the initial draft was painted in watercolor on paper glued together from two envelopes.¹⁴ Tao Yuanqing then reworked the draft into a large-scale oil painting that covered the entire wall behind the artist's bed.¹⁵ The painting was also printed as a postcard by Beixin Book Company. According to Lu Xun, ghosts were believed to be red in the Han dynasty.¹⁶ The conspicuous red in the painting contrasts sharply with the white background and the black ground. Like a poster, it was eye-catching, its visual attractiveness further sustained by a sense of mystery.

The cover shows a female figure, dressed in a blue and red robe, holding a sword with its tip pointing perpendicular to the ground. The arm with the hand holding the sword is raised so unnaturally high that it creates a more comical than intimidating impression. The face is as foreshortened as the body is elongated. She turns her disproportionately small head towards the viewer, who confronts a minimally depicted face where only a few dots are used to suggest features, such as the eyes, the nose, the lips, and the raised chin. A stiff, horseshoe-shaped hairdo sits on top of her head; the part that falls on the shoulders is colored yellow. The sword, its verticality echoing and echoed by the figure's rigid and elongated body, is rather well-defined, while the figure is not as solidly depicted. Standing on buffoonish, platform shoes, her body leans slightly inward as if being strained by the gravity of the downward pointing sword.

¹⁴ Xu Qinwen, "Lu Xun and Tao Yuanqing," 85.

¹⁵ Wang Zhaoqian, "Remember my teacher Mr. Tao Yuanqing." *Yiban* 9 (1929): 278.

¹⁶ Lu Xun, "Nüdiao," in *Lu Xun quanji*, vol. 6, 621-622.

What is she going to do with the sword? The viewer's attention is fully directed to this moment of suspense.

Like Lu Xun's description, Tao Yuanqing also depicted the female ghost in a psychologically charged moment. One could imagine a similar impression on stage: the female ghost manifests her emotions at their peak while striking a pose before the audience. Through non-verbal bodily contortion, the actor conveys the essence of the character in the frozen moment. Xu Qinwen recalls the evening before the painting was created when he and Tao Yuanqing went to see Beijing opera in Beijing. Links between the theatrical performances and Tao Yuanqing's image were made explicit: the half-raised face evokes the Ghost of the Hanged Women from the local Shaoxing opera, the *Mulianxi*. The character originally expresses a "petrifying beauty," and, except for the morbid state, every expression was said to be consistent with the character: sorrowful, enraged, and resistant. The blue shirt, red robe, and platform shoes are very common to costume dramas. The sword-holding pose is adopted from that of the *wusheng* role (a martial male role in Beijing opera), but further simplified and unified.¹⁷

Tao Yuanqing's design, though leaving much to suspense, deploys digestible vocabulary familiar to East Asian pictorial tradition. Historically, figure paintings depicting a singular female figure against a blank ground were restricted to depictions of religious icons, occasionally extending to a larger pantheon including supernatural beings and sanctified historical figures. The blank background, inherited from Chan Buddhist painting tradition, serves to decontextualize the religious figures, conducive to conveying immortality and

¹⁷ Xu Qinwen, "Lu Xun and Tao Yuanqing," 85-86.

omnipresence. The figures can be identified by their attributes and sometimes also via inscriptions. Lu Xun's elevation of the female ghost to the rank of god plays into the pictorial tradition of representing supernatural beings. Layering upon that tradition, Tao Yuanqing enhanced the icon's theatricality with pose and color.

The genre of theatrical figure illustration also conventionally depicts characters against a blank background. The theatrical illustrations created by the painter Shen Bochen 沈泊塵 (1889-1920), for example, often render a well-known moment of a plot against a blank background. The accompanying inscriptions clarify the depicted scene and the identity of characters (figure 4.2). Performances disappear; these illustrations functioned as recordings and visual reproductions of theatrical performances that were not able to be otherwise documented in the early 20th century. They also served as advertisements and self-fashioning vehicles for actors. Usually commissioned as special collections for opera fans, the plots were well remembered so that these illustrations need not display any ambiguity. The exclusion of background and props helps focus on elements central to theatrical expression, such as physiognomy, costume, and poses.¹⁸

Tao Yuanqing's design diverges from traditional figure painting and theatrical illustrations in several ways. While a large area of the background is left unpainted, the female figure stands on an uneven black ground spotted with white specks. The figure is contained by a black frame painted as extension of the black ground. The space, thus, is no longer infinite, but constrained within the black frame tangent with the sword-gripping hand. The sword was not

¹⁸ For more on opera illustrations, see Wu Haoran, *Minguo xiju renwuhua* (Jinan: Qilu shu she, 2012).

the ghost's original attribute in the theatrical performance, but Tao Yuanqing gave her the weapon to signify, perhaps, her vengeful spirit. The black ground bestows a sense of rootedness on the figure. But the planting is destabilized by her semi-spherical boots. One can imagine the figure rock back and forth without quite falling. The ambiguous relationship between the female ghost and the ground provided an uncanny connection with the book's contents despite their independent creation. The book's title "Hometown" clearly signified the allegiance with the native soil literary genre popular at this time. Before returning to discuss the notion of rootedness in Tao Yuanqing's work, I should lay out a background of the native soil movement and the interest in folk culture.

4.3 *Xiangtu, Volkskunde, and the Nation*

The native soil genre, or *xiangtu*, with Lu Xun as its initiator, emerged in the early 20th century and is characterized by a deep feeling of nostalgia as one becomes uprooted from rural provinces over the course of urbanization. As David Der-wei Wang argues, the native soil literature is, in reality, a "rootless" literature, a kind of literature whose meaning derives from the simultaneous (re)discovery and erasure of the treasured image of the homeland.¹⁹ Writing, thus, served as an act to regain such remembrance. In Xu Qinwen's short story collection, for which Tao Yuanqing's design serves as the cover, the eponymous piece entitled "This Time Leaving Hometown" clearly sets the native soil tone for the book. The story describes a young

¹⁹ David Der-wei Wang, "Imaginary Nostalgia: Shen Congwen, Song Zelai, Mo Yan, and Li Yongping," in Ellen Widmer and David Der-wei Wang, eds., *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-Century China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 107-132; 109.

man's complex feelings as he leaves his hometown to return to Beijing in pursuit of his studies. He is burdened by a deep sense of guilt for breaking his arranged marriage and pursuing an intellectual career rather than becoming an official as his parents expect him to do. His mother's rare understanding of his conflicted sentiments further exacerbates the young man's self-doubt.

Such psychological struggles were representative of many youth from the provinces who wished to seek new opportunities in the cosmopolitan Beijing and Shanghai. Xu Qinwen's depiction of hometown might be a little too literal, lacking what David Wang calls the "imaginary nostalgia" and the complexity observed in Lu Xun's rendering of the hometown imagery. Lu Xun's story bearing the same title "Hometown" abounds in humor and ambiguities that entertain and sustain close reading. Where the young writer Xu Qinwen excelled, however, according to Lu Xun, who volunteered as the editor for the collected writing, is in the depiction of the youth's nuanced psychology tinged by a tender naiveté resonating with many who shared the experience.

Coinciding with the emergence of the native soil literature, the interest in folk culture among Chinese intellectuals further enhanced the allure of the supernatural and fantastical nature of the imaginary hometown. The romantic view of rural life and the general tendency towards romanticism in literature in the 1920s represented an attractive approach to combat the love-hate relationship writers experienced with the urban environment in Shanghai. As Chang-tai Hung demonstrates, the discovery of folk literature was spurred and fueled by a few factors: the overall literary tendency to romanticize rural life, the need to establish a national culture, direct influences from late-Qing compilation of Chinese folklore by foreign writers, the importance of the Japanese folklorist Yanagita Kunio's (1875-1962) work in China, and a

renewed interests in early Chinese collections of folk literature such as *The Book of Odes* and the *yuefu* music verse.²⁰ In addition, along with the wholesale introduction of Western arts and sciences, the 19th century German *Volkskunde* tradition exemplified by authors such as Johann Gottfried von Herder and the Grimm Brothers provided a theoretical ground for the studies of Chinese folk culture. The nationalistic tenor underlying the ethnographic and folk culture movement inherent to *Volkskunde* was attractive to Chinese intellectuals who were in need of establishing a national heritage amidst perceived cultural crises. What were considered as backward superstitions, and therefore rejected in the late-Qing period, enjoyed a positive reassessment in the early 20th century by writers such as Zhou Zuoren and Gu Jiegang. The rigorous scholarly interest in popular superstitions signified, ironically, an effort to modernize the nation by establishing a unique cultural identity, the essence of which was believed to reside in folk wisdom.²¹

Calls for the creation of a national poetry, a national music, and a national art, although lacking in clear definition of what they should entail, became the imperative of all arts. In an effort to solicit folksongs from the public, for instance, the first issue of *Folksong Weekly* makes the link between folksongs and national poetry explicit:

Folksongs are one of the major components of folklore. We intend to collect them for future research. This is our first objective. Because we believe that there is no such thing as obscenity or vulgarity in the academic field, it is not necessary for the contributors to weed out [such things] themselves. Send us what you have collected, and we shall select

²⁰ Chang-tai Hung, *Going to the People: Chinese Intellectuals and Folk Literature 1918-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 1-31.

²¹ For more discussion on the development of Chinese folklore studies, see Koyasu Kayoko, *Kindai chūgoku ni okeru minzokugaku no keifu: kokumin, minshū, chishikijin* (Tokyo: Ochanomizu shobō, 2008), and Lydia H. Liu, "A Folksong Immortal and Official Popular Culture," in Judith T. Zeitlin and Lydia H. Liu, eds., *Writing and Materiality in China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 553-609.

them on the basis of literary merit and compile them into a selected work on the voice of the folk. As Guido Vitale once said, "A new national poetry could perhaps spring up based on these rhythms and on the true feelings of the people." Therefore, this kind of work is not merely to bring to light things that have been hidden, but also to accelerate the speed of the development of a national poetry.²²

Increased encounters with non-Chinese cultures created an incentive for the Chinese to dispel the diffusionist model of culture expansion. The effective national agenda adopted by China's neighbor Japan drove China further onto the path of national essentialization. China was literally digging for its national essence. Using the Anyang excavation project from 1927 to 1928 as case study, Sarah Fraser argues that government sponsored archaeology was part of the search for ancestors for the new nation and the new nationalist citizen in modern China.

Antiquarianism, or its modern incarnation archaeology, and primitivism, a term applicable to research of ruins and modern cultures in China's west were all parts of an effort to define what it meant to be Chinese in the Republican period. The "antiquarian" and the "primitive" may be considered most productively as archaeological and anthropological excavations informed by anxiety about national identity in China's first non-imperial state in the early twentieth century China.²³

Folk culture likewise instilled a new vitality into Chinese visual art, and to a lesser extent, overt affiliation with nationalism. The painter and art theorist Chen Shizeng (Chen Hengke), the calligrapher who designed the characters for Lu Xun's *Collected Stories from Abroad* (1909) created a series of what he called "pictures of folk life in Beijing" between 1914 and

²² Quoted from Hung, *Going to the People*, 50.

²³ Sarah E. Fraser, "Antiquarianism or Primitivism? The Edge of History in the Modern Chinese Imagination," in Wu Hung ed., *Reinventing the Past: Archaism and Antiquarianism in Chinese Art and Visual Culture* (Chicago: Center for the Arts of East Asia, University of Chicago, 2010), 342-367; 351.

1915.²⁴ In China, Chen Shizeng was revered as an artist who essentially altered what was considered elitist traditional ink painting practice into a relevant medium to social reforms in the modern era. A classmate of Lu Xun in Tokyo's Kōbungakuin, Chen Shizeng also played a key role in the rediscovery of Chinese painting via Japan. While studying in Japan, Chen Shizeng acquired a strong design sensibility in his ink painting that later became the preferred aesthetic choice in East Asian ink painting exemplified in the works by Qi Baishi 齊白石 (1864-1957) and Takeuchi Seihō 竹内栖鳳 (1864-1942). His achievement in calligraphy, seal-carving, and art history writing and translation further raised his stature as a cultural figure in modern China.²⁵ It is around this time that the more "eccentric" painters were canonized back into Chinese art history as a means to transcend the schematic painting manuals that were believed to be the cause for the decline of Chinese painting. Painters such as Zhu Da, Shi Tao, Jin Nong, and Luo Ping found an active lineage in the works of Chen Shizeng and his protégé Qi Baishi.

Chen Shizeng's unusual depiction of the folk culture in the streets of Beijing also prefigured a new genre in Chinese modern art, known as *manhua*, a term mentioned in passing in Chapter 3. The genre is best exemplified by the works of the artist Feng Zikai. Feng Zikai paid homage to Chen Shizeng in his album *Portrait of the City* (*Dushi xiang* 都市相) in which he expressed great compassion towards those unprivileged marginalized and displaced by the process of urbanization. Chen Shizeng's series "pictures of folk life in Beijing" attempted to

²⁴ Chen Shizeng, *Beijing fengsu tu* (Beijing: Beijing guji chubanshe, 1986). These pictures were not published as album until much later. The original individual paintings were posthumously published in the *Beiyang huabao* (North Sea Pictorial) in 1926.

²⁵ For a discussion on Chen Shizeng's art theory, see Aida Yuen Wong, *Parting the Mists: Discovering Japan and the Rise of National-Style Painting in Modern China*, 63-68.

create portraits of people types local to Beijing: rickshaw driver, street musician, fortune teller, begging woman, as well as sarcastic social “types” such as the eavesdroppers and women returning to their parental homes. These types were subjects unworthy of pictorial representation prior to this time.

Adding to the expansion of subject matter is the folk culture dimension that vividly brought out the colorful labyrinth that was the old city of Beijing. These pictures certainly induce a sympathy for the petty residents and social outcasts, but they also conjure up much more complex sentiments ranging from sympathy to frustration, nostalgia to amusement, and often also sarcasm. Rendered with extremely minimal and economical brushwork, the individuals are depicted with their occupational accoutrements against a blank background. Each image is accompanied by an inscription written by other popular calligraphers or painters in Beijing at the time. One such image entitled “The Tea Drinker” depicts the frontal view of a tea drinker wearing a fur hat and carrying a tea pot tucked under his crossed arms (figure 4.3). The inscription reads: “Rat-fur hat on the head, with my head low, I walk the street. I am a tea drinker, calling out for a big tea pot.”

Under the new taxonomy of folk customs, the common daily activity of tea-drinking became a worthy subject of ink painting. The image is striking for several reasons. First, the heavy grey tone renders the figure relatively bleak for the otherwise leisurely activity. Second, the blank background diverts all visual interests to the central figure where the visual interest further centers around the tea pot. Lastly, despite the frontal view, the facial feature of the tea drinker is entirely nondescript. While the tea drinker represents a familiar social type in Beijing,

Chen Shizeng's depiction casts an ambiguous mood over the figure—charming yet pathetic, gloomy but filled with the impending joy of a big hot pot of tea.

The generation of layered emotions by Chen Shizeng's painting is not unlike the strong yet ineffable affect in Tao Yuanqing's *Big Red Robe*. The dramatically foreshortened face captures the distressed, angry, yet strong-willed expression characteristic of the character of the ghost. Lu Xun was particularly struck by the painting because it oscillates aesthetically between the enigmatic haunting darkness of the female ghost and an awkward, endearing, almost comical way of rendering such a fearful motif. Features such as the stiff, angular hair, and the imperfectly drawn sword entertain rather than intimidate. The terrifying, yet charming figure reminded Lu Xun all too well of the anxiety and delight he experienced watching the female ghost in local plays as a child.

4.4 Provincial versus Cosmopolitan

What compelled Lu Xun to turn Tao Yuanqing's painting into a cover design for a book dealing with "home and soil" was, perhaps, the image's capacity to provoke all sorts of imaginations larger than the proper notion of "hometown" itself. Local superstitions and theatrical performances in Shaoxing provided an indispensable interpretive context for Tao Yuanqing's work, but the work cannot be reduced to an adaption of the character. The fact that it was initially created as a painting independent of the book's content diminishes the semantic connection between word and image. Indeed, the image and the book diverge in how they evoke emotions. In Xu Qinwen's short story, the notion of the "hometown" is conveyed through an empathetic approach. The clash between the old and new, the urban and rural are registered

in the protagonist's psychology marked by self-doubt and a deep sense of displacement. Rather than premising itself upon a conflicting dichotomy, the image seems to be the summation of a range of sentiments. The sincerity in Xu Qinwen's writing undermines the agency of the creative process. T.S. Eliot tells us that poetry is not the turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.²⁶ Certain folk customs can feed as inspirational visual sources, but Tao Yuanqing's image imparts no obvious sense of detachment or attachment.

Similar to Chen Shizeng's depiction of the folk culture in Beijing, one cannot quite fully articulate the gamut of visual experiences. The pictorial ambiguities invite readings while simultaneously putting those readings into question. The image undoes impressions as soon as it creates them. The book provides its own context, permitting the understanding of anything particular and local. The painting *Big Red Robe*, in contrast, enables universal understanding by virtue of lacking context. It could be appreciated for its tie to nativism and vernacular culture as well as for its modern appearance signifying a pluralistic cosmopolitanism. The painting deeply touched Lu Xun and Xu Qinwen, both locals of Shaoxing, because it represented, for them, a role they knew so well since childhood. For the majority of its readers in Shanghai, the image epitomized a modern work of design, its abstract visual language and indecisiveness in meaning were very fitting of the cosmopolitan environment. Borrowing a frozen pose from theatrical performance, the picture leaves us forever in the moment of suspense without sequel.

²⁶ T.S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*, 58.

Tao Yuanqing created a cover design for another of Xu Qinwen's short story collection entitled *Snot-nosed Ah Er* (*Biti A'er* 鼻涕阿二) in 1927. The eponymous story firmly grounds itself in the native soil genre. It tells the tragic life story of a village woman insultingly nicknamed "snot-nosed Ah Er." Mistreated by her family and fellow villagers, after two ill-fated marriages, she finally becomes the victim of backward superstitions and slanders. The initial sympathy the reader feels towards the family's maltreatment of their second daughter Ah Er gradually transforms into a frustration over Ah Er's servility and what Lu Xun labels as numbness (*mamu*) in Chinese citizenry, as the protagonist later perpetuates this mistreatment towards people of even lowlier social status. Overall, the story casts the backward rural villages in a rather sordid and hopeless light. Tao Yuanqing was likely aware of the story's desolate tone since Xu Qinwen directly asked him for the design without Lu Xun's intervention. Yet the cover displays a baffling levity at odds with the underlying depressing story.

The abstract design depicts what the artist Qian Juntao identified as a half butterfly catcher, half modern cosmopolitan lady (figure 4.4).²⁷ Butterfly catching, *pudie* in Chinese, was an elitist pastime in China for ladies. The activity involves catching and playing with butterflies in the garden. The activity's close association with spring, women, and frivolity readily lent it to become a major motif in poetic and visual representations especially after the Song dynasty. The image of an elegant lady playing with butterflies with her long sleeves and fans was further idealized as a metaphor for female beauty and longing for love. A butterfly-catching scene from the great classic novel *Dream of the Red Chamber* (*Honglou meng* 紅樓夢) from the 18th century

²⁷ Qian Juntao, "Tao Yuanqing lun," 109.

enhanced the rhetoric's appeal in popular taste.²⁸ In this scene, Lady Baochai is distracted by the sudden appearance of two large butterflies. Intrigued by the fluttering butterflies, she takes out her fan from her sleeve and waved it around to catch them. She cannot follow their nimble movement and eventually gives up.²⁹ The scene appeared in a series of illustrations for *The Dream of the Red Chamber* by the Qing painter Gai Qi 改琦 (1773-1828) (figure 4.5). The print depicts a classic dainty beauty holding out her folding fan to catch the butterflies. Despite the profuse use of flowy lines, the illustration does not quite match the scene's liveliness as it is rendered in literature. The static representation leaves little for the imagination. In his essay, Liu Yongqiang traces the motif's popularity in painting eliciting examples painted by the Ming painter Chen Hongshou and the Qing court painter Fei Yigeng 費以耕 (d.1870) (figure 4.6). In a similar vein, Fei Yigeng's rendering of the butterfly catcher represents the conventional mode of the painterly adaptation—a rather literal visualization of the scene from *Dream of the Red Chamber*.

After the motif of the flute player (discussed in Chapter 3), Tao Yuanqing adapted here another popular motif in Chinese poetry and art. Unlike the flute player in which the dynamic design reflects the synesthetic quality of music, the inherent liveliness of the butterfly-catcher motif lent itself well to abstraction in graphic design. Departing from convention, Tao Yuanqing capitalized on all kinds of actions and movements implied by the activity in the virtuoso design.

²⁸ For a close analysis of the imagery's history in Chinese poetry and painting, see Liu Yongqiang, "The sentiments in the scene of Baochai catching the butterflies." *Wenshi zhishi* (Chinese Literature and History), 11 (2013): 63-69.

²⁹ Cao Xueqing and Gao E, *Honglou meng* (Dream of Red Chamber), episode 27 (Hong Kong: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 314.

The out-of-balance figure swings her arms as she holds up a folding fan. The three curlicues to the left of the figure can be read as abstract butterfly patterns balancing off of the tilting figure. The patterned figure itself spreads out like wings of a butterfly, flapping and dancing as she struggles to catch the butterflies. Indeed, in literature, butterflies often stand for the personification of the elegant female, only more free and cheerful as spring arrives. In the design, swirling lines and rhythmic patterns further enliven the blithe pastel yellows, pinks, and greens. The figure's face is rendered in Tao Yuanqing's typical mode, marked by misalignments between eye sockets, eyebrows, and pupils. Qian Juntao's impression of seeing a modern urban lady in the design has more to do with the abstract style rather than any visible identity marker. The lithe and dynamic butterfly catcher simulates the rhythm of a lively urban environment in contrast to the depressing and bleak picture of the countryside conjured up in the underlying novel.

One can speculate that Tao Yuanqing did not take the native soil genre too seriously. His own account of his hometown Shaoxing, diverging from the heavy psychological charge of Lu Xun and Xu Qinwen's works, offers odd humor, triviality, and little nostalgia:

Shaoxing has many beggars as well as snakes and frogs. Because of rice paddies, there are also grasshoppers. Grasshoppers eat the rice plant, so they are pests; frogs eat grasshoppers, therefore they are beneficial; snakes eat frogs, and they are also considered pests; beggars catch snakes, but they are not called beneficial.³⁰

The paragraph is characteristic of the light mockery and dark humor in Tao Yuanqing's description of his hometown. In other passages, he ridicules a local superstition that grants great importance to the coffin. A man is so superstitious regarding preparation of the coffin for

³⁰ Tao Yuanqing, "Shaoxing." *Yaboluo*, 3 (1928): 78-87.

his mother that he keeps the coffin in his tiny room until it actually serves his own untimely death. Tao Yuanqing's Shaoxing abounds in such bitterly humorous images. He was not interested in conveying conflicting emotions like a typical native soil writer, but the image he painted of the hometown is no less sophisticated, exhibiting a bizarre sense of levity comparable to the playfulness in his cover design for Xu Qinwen's rather disheartening stories. That unusual lightness of form and mind is the dominating quality that bestows cosmopolitanism to Tao Yuanqing's art.

The notion of cosmopolitanism, as recent scholarship suggests, represents a useful, yet challenging lens with which to investigate transnational and transhistorical political, social, and artistic practices. It seems that even specifying and defining cosmopolitanism is an unc cosmopolitan thing to do.³¹ Rebecca Walkowitz, in her analysis of modernist literary style, proposes the concept of critical cosmopolitanism. Born out of a distrust of civilizing processes, and of the role of art in these processes, writers develop forms of critical cosmopolitanism that reflect both a desire for and an ambivalence about collective social projects. An important mechanism she points out is that the cosmopolitan attitudes disrupt neutral models of purpose, evaluation, and detachment not by way of resistance but by transforming and amending them, with mindsets such as flirtation, playfulness, confusion, and evasion.³² In understanding late-twentieth-century theories of cosmopolitanism, Walkowitz lays out three traditions or thoughts upon which they rely:

³¹ Carol A. Breckenridge, Sheldon Pollock et al, *Cosmopolitanism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 1.

³² Rebecca Walkowitz, *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 4.

A philosophical tradition that promotes allegiance to a transnational or global community, emphasizing detachment from local cultures and the interests of the nation; a more recent anthropological tradition that emphasizes multiple or flexible attachments to more than one nation and community, resisting conceptions of allegiance that presuppose consistency and uncritical enthusiasm; and a vernacular or popular tradition that values the risks of social deviance and the resources of consumer culture and urban mobility.³³

The perceived casualness in Tao Yuanqing's art hinges upon an absence of any strong allegiance or attachment. It is not detachment, since he was fundamentally interested in reconfiguring motifs of the past and was certainly equally enchanted by make-believe gods and ghosts from his native Shaoxing. The coexistence of a butterfly catcher and an urban lady, the doubleness of the classical beauty and the modern girl, reveals how design could overcome such categorical and symbolic divides in pictorial terms. It occupied both realms, local and universal. Even seeing through our contemporary eye, his art still appears to be without any specific national or cultural affiliation. It is noteworthy that Tao Yuanqing mostly worked in isolation during a period when forming alliances and societies was the common practice.³⁴ Tao Yuanqing's work exhibits great diversity in what we may call style, liberty in his choice of motif, and autonomy from the underlying literature. Not only could he easily dispense with the discourse of national style in design, he could also do away with any theoretical justification. The sense of levity and casualness in his art masquerades mockery and aversion to rational consistency and uncritical enthusiasm. In contrast, the utter unseriousness displayed in his literary adaptation of the White Snake legend is less successful in fine-tuning his radical

³³ Ibid., 9.

³⁴ For a discussion on the widespread phenomenon of forming art societies of the period, see Qiao Zhiqiang, *Zhongguo jindai huihua shetuan yanjiu* [Studies of Art Societies in Modern China] (Beijing: Rongbaozhai chubanshe, 2009).

consciousness—radical meaning the luxury to tease, to fool, and to amuse during an anxious reform period.

Despite Lu Xun's descriptive ineloquence, he best captured the transcultural tendency in Tao Yuanqing's art: his art is free of literary jargon since he uses new forms and colors; it is neither 'yes' or 'no,' because he is after all Chinese. Therefore, it is wrong to evaluate him with a metric scale, but also not with a *lüzhi* yardstick from the Han dynasty or a measuring tool of the Qing dynasty, because he lives in the present. I feel that one can understand his art only by measuring him with a scale of aspiration for a Chinese to participate in the project of the world.³⁵ To "participate in the project of the world (*canyu shiji shang de shiye*)" describes the notion of cosmopolitanism in 1920s China.

4.5 Apathy against Affect

The world of Shaoxing, both a tie and a gap, offered many visual cues for Tao Yuanqing's paintings. He created a painting entitled *Remnant of the Yingtian Pagoda* (*Shaosheng de Yingtian ta*) while still in his hometown Shaoxing in 1923 (figure 4.7). The literary journal *Eastern Miscellany* (*Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌) had planned to reproduce the painting in an issue in 1925, but eventually abandoned the plan, fearing that people might not take the picture seriously. Four years later, shortly after the painter's death in August 1929, the journal posthumously published the painting to commemorate Tao Yuanqing as one of the period's greatest painters.

³⁵ Lu Xun, ""Dang Tao Yuanqing jun de huihua zhanlan shi wo suoyao shuode jiju hua [My comment upon seeing Tao Yuanqing's painting exhibition]," in *Lu Xun lun meishu*, 10.

It is easy to understand the journal's initial hesitance to reproduce the painting if one surveys the journal's illustrations from the year 1925. While mainly focusing on current events and literary creation, the bi-weekly usually reproduced one painting in color at the beginning of each issue. Despite the eclectic nature of these color plates, ranging from archaeological discovery of King Tutankhamun's tomb to landscape paintings allegedly from the Song dynasty, they largely fall into three categories: European paintings by obscure painters such as a small landscape by Konstantin Korovin, Song dynasty fan paintings by famous court painters including Ma Yuan 馬遠 (c. 1160-1225), and contemporary ink landscapes by literati such as Shen Meisou 沈寐叟 (1850-1922) and Lin Qinnan 林琴南 (1852-1924).

Like other journals of the period, the *Eastern Miscellany* would publish any available European paintings, with a preference for the Impressionist style, as well as Chinese paintings from the Song dynasty, which best served the purpose of boasting their role as cultural authority. Their choice of contemporary paintings is rather random. Both Shen Meisou and Lin Qinnan were men of letters known for their literary output rather than painting. Lin Qinnan, more widely known as Lin Shu 林紓, was popular for his rendering of foreign novels into literary Chinese. The only contemporary Western-style painting by a Chinese painter included in the illustrations was a modest oil landscape by Ding Guangxie 丁光燮 (b.1902). Little is known of the painter's career except that he had studied in Europe before establishing *The Pacific Pictorial* (*Taipingyang huapao*) in 1924. Despite his obscurity, the experience of having studied abroad bestowed extreme prestige and authority on a painter in the 1910s and 1920s. More than anything, the *Eastern Miscellany* desired authority and prestige as it was competing

with other publications in Shanghai. In 1925, Tao Yuanqing's provincial background and non-elite status would hardly boost the journal's repute.

Yet, beyond the issue of social class and prestige, the disenchantment with the painting ultimately has more to do with the choice of subject matter and the way it was painted. Tao Yuanqing depicts the landmark seven-storied pagoda in his hometown Shaoxing. The original pagoda was believed to have been built during the Southern dynasties (420-589), but common to most ancient architecture in China, was subsequent destroyed by fire and rebuilt several times until 1901 when it was finally devastated by incense gone awry. Hovering over other temple structures in the painting, the seven-storied pagoda is rendered in a series of translucent, broad, and quick brushstrokes that serve to model the pagoda's shape and volume, but simultaneously decompose the structure since they appear so visibly as individual brushstrokes. The building to the left of the pagoda lacks any definable brushwork other than the roof tiles, which are accentuated with an orange-red color that is also used to delineate the eaves of each story. Although the colorful patches of brushwork serve to give form to the pagoda and its surrounding structures, the spectator is made aware of the painterly construct upon close scrutiny.

The effect is not exclusive to this painting, but true to many modern paintings; what is remarkable of Tao's work, however, is that he achieved this double vision with extreme brush economy. The bold brushwork, commented his fellow painter Qian Juntao: "opens up a new method in Chinese painting."³⁶ The Western-style paintings reproduced by *Eastern Miscellany* in

³⁶ Qian Juntao, "Tao Yuanqing lun," 106.

1925 generally belonged to the Impressionist school—as seen in the examples of Konstantin Korovin’s and Ding Guangxie’s landscapes—that relied on heavy build-up of brushstrokes to create form and render luminosity. Tao Yuanqing’s painting, though unclear whether the original was watercolor, oil, or a mix of both, dispenses with the build-up of layering paint. In some areas, the unpainted white background shows through in between colors. The methodical brushwork of the Impressionist school painters was favored over Tao Yuanqing’s defiant, almost not very brush-like paint application that failed to impress the *Eastern Miscellany* in 1925.³⁷

As for the subject matter, the work may be the earliest pictorial representation of architectural ruins in Chinese painting. According to Wu Hung, pictorial representations of architectural ruins and actual “ruin architecture” virtually did not exist in pre-modern Chinese art because the sense of decay, death and rebirth is conveyed rather by metaphors and experienced on a psychological level. “There was indeed an unspoken taboo,” he remarks, “against preserving and portraying architectural ruins; although abandoned cities or fallen palaces were lamented in words, their images, if actually painted, would imply inauspiciousness and danger.”³⁸ As for modern painterly representations of ruins, Gao Jianfu’s 1926 painting entitled *Five-Storeyed Tower* (wucenglou) is the closest in date with Tao Yuanqing’s painting (figure 4.8). While Tao Yuanqing’s depiction concentrates on the actual architecture, Gao Jianfu’s lavishes great effort on the rendering of luminous intensity and atmospheric effects

³⁷ Xu Qinwen suggests that Tao Yuanqing would often paint with his fingers. See Xu Qinwen, “Tao Yuanqing ji qi huihua,” in *Xu Qinwen sanwen ji*, 334-335.

³⁸ Wu Hung, *A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 94.

to create a dramatic light contrast between the dusking sky and the glowing tower on top of the green hills. Gao Jianfu's goal was to create an overall mood conducive to lamenting the ravages of time, to function as a national allegory of suffering.

Although Gao Jianfu diverged from the traditional repertoire of Chinese brushstroke types, his pictorial language, argues Wu Hung, "remained largely symbolic, employing conventional historical or religious symbols and allusions."³⁹ The tower, originally named Tower of Guarding the Sea, was allegedly built in 1380 as a project to expand the city of Guangzhou. It was a high-rise from which one could overlook the city and the name itself implies auspiciousness and stability. The historic high-rise, having witnessed political vicissitudes is now left in a ruinous state. Gao Jianfu's own inscription on the painting—a typical *huaigu* poem lamenting the passing of time, as suggested by Wu Hung—further attests to the emotional stirring the painting intended to provoke: "the eternal high tower is only left to be with the wending weeds, the desolate mist and the refined light of the setting sun."⁴⁰

Unlike his later painting *A Chinese City in Ruins* that actually depicts rubble, albeit symbolically, Gao Jianfu's painting of the dilapidated five-storied tower does not portray the building as ruins. As an emblematic icon of Romanticism in Europe, Andreas Huyssen argues that architectural ruins are examples of the indissoluble combination of spatial and temporal desires that trigger nostalgia—counteracting, even undermining, linear notions of progress—and that romantic images of ruins, especially in the 19th century, tend to domesticate and

³⁹ Ibid., 152

⁴⁰ "萬劫危樓,祇賸得蔓草荒煙,淡雅殘照。"

beautify ruins by way of the picturesque.⁴¹ Still unaccustomed to representing ruins in a literal sense, Gao Jianfu drew the focus away from the architecture and attempted to beautify the landscape with the help of luminosity. The shared deep *huaigu* (lamenting the past) sentiment thus represented brings Gao Jianfu close to the European Romanticist counterparts.

Tao Yuanqing's depiction of the pagoda from his hometown expresses little sense of nostalgia. He included three figures in the foreground. The painting looks more like a quick sketch without too much deliberation upon its embedded significance. Yet, he did not just paint any ruined architecture, but one that is laden with profound religious, historical, and cultural significance throughout Chinese history. It was even more intensively laden following the fall of the famous Leifeng pagoda on September 25, 1924, an event that was seen as a metaphor for the dramatic changes in Chinese culture in the mid-20's. Eugene Wang argues that unlike other architectural types such as terraces, tomb sites and pavilions, the pagoda was not a common subject of literary exercises because of its dark overtones of numinous otherness. As a Buddhist monument that commemorates the Buddha's sacred traces, it borders on the numinous realm and evokes dark supernatural forces that it seeks to pacify. "Precisely because of its otherness," claims Wang, "a pagoda presents itself as a potential alternative topos, one that engages the supernatural, the numinous and the demonic."⁴²

In China, the representation of the pagoda is conventionally limited to Buddhist contexts. In painting, pagodas, if depicted, usually serve as an indicator of a monastery complex

⁴¹ Andreas Huyssen, "Nostalgia for Ruins." *Grey Room*, 23 (Spring, 2006): 7; 14.

⁴² Eugene Y. Wang, "Tope and Topos: The Leifeng Pagoda and the Discourse of the Demonic," 490.

in landscapes.⁴³ Pagodas only appeared as the sole subject matter of a painting in the 19th century, for example, in the works of the Buddhist monk painter Xugu 虚谷 (1824-1896). In an album leaf from 1876, Xugu depicts an image of a solitary pagoda surrounded by puffs of dark clouds (figure 4.9). The celestial viewpoint from which the pagoda is seen and the overall cloudiness that partially conceals the rest of the monastery complex add a layer of romanticism and mystery to the painting. The red, well-defined pagoda contrasts with the murky and formless clouds around it, bestowing a timeless imperishability to the Buddhist monument. The sheer concentration on the pagoda as icon glorifies solitude while expressing the hope for transcendence.

The depiction of a pagoda in ruins was only possible through the photographic medium in the late 19th century when European photojournalists began to create commercial photographs of picturesque images from China. The photographs they took in China frequently presented ruined pagodas and dilapidated gardens—two quintessential features of the Chinese built environment in the European imagination.⁴⁴ Soon after the Europeans, the Chinese themselves also took on the picturesque mode of ruin images in both painting and the printed medium (figure 4.10).⁴⁵ Pan Yuliang's 1932 oil painting of the famous Tiger Hill Pagoda in Suzhou best illustrates the new significance of the pagoda, that, although it still pertains to the

⁴³ For a history of pictorial representation of pagoda in the Song dynasty, see Eugene Y. Wang, "Response: 'Picture Idea' and Its Cultural Dynamics in Northern Song China." *The Art Bulletin*, LXXXIX, 3 (2007): 463-481.

⁴⁴ Wu Hung, *A Story of Ruins*, 105.

⁴⁵ For a discussion on the picturesque mode of ruins in Chinese modern painting, see Stephanie Wen-hui Su, "Ruins as Sites of Modernity: Yan Wenliang's Representation of Roman Ruins in 1930." *Modern Art Asia* (November, 2010): 37-62.

huaigu genre, it has become a global image, as Wu Hung argues, “conveying not only a Western sentiment toward a timeless Chinese architectural tradition, but also signifying modern Chinese artists’ longing for a vanished past.”⁴⁶ The raised perspective in the work thus implies the longing and the impossibility of ever arriving at the cherished past.

Tao Yuanqing’s painting of the Yingtian Pagoda has little Buddhist invocation, nor was it a romantic image in the picturesque mode, or an expression of *huaigu* in the modern sense. The sketchiness of the painting presumably resonates with the allegedly ruined state of the tower. The undefined colorful patches and their diluteness can be understood as having representational value. A photograph of the tower dated to 1935 shows the tower not in the kind of ruinous state typical of classical antiquity (figure 4.11). The 1901 fire only destroyed its wooden components, including the eaves and the staircase providing access to the top. The main body made of stone and brick retained its architectural integrity. The austerity of the ancient high-rise is compromised by the dynamic, colorful patches playing off of each other. The inclusion of the figures approaching the pagoda in the foreground further eliminates the possibility of it being a *memento mori*.

Tao Yuanqing painted the pagoda at a time when the practice of sketching from life (*xiesheng*) was popular in newly established art schools. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the method of *xiesheng* offered a refreshing antidote to the hackneyed tradition of copying from old masters and consulting painting manuals. Soon, however, conventional Chinese art critics began to mock the overuse of measuring tools in painting, which, according to Yu Jianhua, drained

⁴⁶ Wu Hung, *A Story of Ruins*, 117.

paintings of liveliness. Feng Zikai similarly lamented on the carrying out of *xiesheng* using the wrong methods, resulting in dull and uninspiring works. Tao Yuanqing had not left his hometown Shaoxing in 1923, and produced the painting of the pagoda without the formal training that he would later receive in Shanghai. He painted a pagoda devoid of religious overtone, non-conducive to lamenting over the ravages of time, and insulated from native soil sentimentality. He approached the subject as if he was sketching from life during which painterly concerns such as brushstrokes and color combination would dominate. It is simultaneously the least kind of work one would expect to see as a sketch from life. Tao Yuanqing was remembered as an artist who never drew or painted as one saw the world. He cared little for anatomy and chiaroscuro. The visual interest of the painting rests on the colorful planes intersecting each other and the brushwork's sheer boldness. Rather than being an embodiment and outlet of emotions, the image lingers like an emotional impasse, denying any depth beyond the kaleidoscopic surface.

Coda: All about Surface

The focus on surface seems at odds with the period's persistent quest for depth and essence. Lu Xun, obsessed with the notion of national character, could not help attaching the essentialist term even to Tao Yuanqing's art as he struggled to characterize it. But Lu Xun was not using it in the simplistic nationalistic sense. Lydia Liu argues that Lu Xun actually portrays a narrator in his novel who is capable of analyzing and criticizing the protagonist's backwardness. "May Fourth writers such as Lu Xun deployed the theory of Chinese character to justify this endeavor by pointing an accusing finger at the indigenous tradition, culture, and

the classical heritage and, in so doing, hoped to emerge as the subject and agent of their own history."⁴⁷ In his commentary on Tao Yuanqing's art, the term national character (*minzuxing*) assumed an extremely positive connotation, but Lu Xun used it to label an art that lacked any visible marker of what one usually referred to as national painting at the time.

In painting, the Chinese took the Japanese neologism *kokuga*, *guohua* in Chinese, meaning national painting, to refer to the medium of ink and mineral pigments on silk or paper ground. As Aida Yuen Wong reveals, in Japan *kokuga* encompassed both Western-style and Japanese-style paintings whereas *guohua* was a term exclusively reserved for Chinese ink painting.⁴⁸ Later, the term *xinguohua* (New National Painting) emerged to signify Chinese painting with a modern twist. The Cantonese painters Gao Jianfu, Gao Qifeng, and Chen Shuren were promoters of the New National Painting, a style inflected by the Maruyama Shijō School in the Kyoto circle.⁴⁹ The New National Painting style was thus known as an eclectic approach premised upon a synthesis of Western art's realism and chiaroscuro with traditional merits of the ink medium. Those who had studied painting in France, represented by Xu Beihong and Lin Fengmian, likewise argued for the cross-fertilization between Chinese and European art. In an essay advocating for a fusion style, Lin Fengmian took pains to historicize and essentialize what he called Eastern and Western art from antiquity to modern times.⁵⁰ Although aiming for a more international language of painting, the synthesis was nonetheless

⁴⁷ Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice*, 76.

⁴⁸ Aida Yuen Wong, xxiii.

⁴⁹ On the New National Painting, see Ralph Croizier, *Art and Revolution in Modern China*, 72-88.

⁵⁰ Lin Fengmian, "Dongxi yishu zhi qiantu." *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern Miscellany), 23:10 (1926): 97-104.

underlined by the assumption that Chinese and European art were fundamentally diametrically opposed. Lin Fengmian and Xu Beihong were practitioners of both ink and oil painting. They wished for, not so much a national painting as the term was exclusively reserved for ink painting, but a painting of the nation that would expand beyond the ink medium and traditional subject matter.

What underlies the literal digging into earth (aforementioned archaeological excavations) and the historicizing of national styles was a desperate demand for history, depth, and essence. Tao Yuanqing's unusual interest in surface unmoors us from the obsession with substance and structure. The very practice of designing book covers itself calls attention to the notion of surface-ness. Tao Yuanqing's design "clothes the book with a morose yet beautiful coat." Lu Xun's sartorial metaphor was well taken. It is not by accident that the Chinese word for book cover Lu Xun used was *shuyi*, literally book clothes. Clothes veil and reveal the body at the same time, enriching the underneath body by activating our senses. In her exploration on surface and new materiality, Giuliana Bruno places extreme emphasis on the sartorial gesture which engages surface materiality. Drawing from Gilles Deleuze, Bruno provides a layered analysis of the notion of envelopment and enfoldment performed by the surface. Using fabrics and folds in both the literal and the figurative sense, she argues that surface functions as a partition that mediates by acting as a material configuration of how the visible meet the thinkable. Bruno regards surface as an enveloping fabric and explores the manifold senses in which surface becomes an extensive form of textual contact. The creative possibility of the folds (both literal and metaphorical) can be a useful idea in thinking through Lu Xun and Tao

Yuanqing's "book clothes" project. It entertained a surface condition that, borrowing Bruno's words, "gives physical texture to frames of mind."⁵¹

There is a particular kind of fold in the book. In the previous chapters, I mentioned the bristle and rough lines preferred by Tao Yuanqing in his cover designs. The undercrafted linear quality is linked to the textuality of books. In the Republican period, many intellectuals preferred the rough touch of the uncut books resulting from printing a number of pages on one big sheet of paper. Several pages could be literally folded and gathered, so that one has to cut them open to read. Lu Xun, jokingly claiming his loyalty to what he calls the *maobian dang* (the uncut club) expresses his predilection for the uncut in a letter to a publisher asking him to reserve 10 uncut copies for himself.⁵² In another letter, he amusingly compares books with cut pages to people with no hair, like a monk or a nun.⁵³ Naturally, the aesthetic virtue of the uncut is that it provides a much more interactive and fun reading experience. Lu Xun cherished the haptic experience produced when coming into contact with the fuzzy, fibrous touch of paper and the slitting of it as one advances the reading.

The material potential folded within an uncut book is comparable to the harsh physical texture simulated in Tao Yuanqing's designs. His fuzzy, often unconnected and misaligned lines could point to many things: the printing process whether accidental or intentional, or the quick change of mind as one works through the design. It is not just fuzziness or texture, he also

⁵¹ Giuliana Bruno, *Surface: Matters of Aesthetics, Materiality, and Media* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 20.

⁵² Lu Xun, "Letter to Cao Juren," in *Lu Xun shuxin ji*, 795.

⁵³ Lu Xun, "Letter to Xiao Jun," in *Lu Xun shuxin ji*, 845.

simulated what Jonathan Hay refers to as “mesoperceptual awareness,” a synesthetic sensibility of the five senses that surfaces might induce.⁵⁴ Chapter 3 discusses the cover design Tao Yuanqing created for Lu Xun’s short story collection *Wandering* in terms of its connection with the childlike aesthetic. If we consider the design now, its desire to render palpable the visual effect of the rising/setting sun, the misshapen contour of the sun and stubby lines around it could be understood as evoking the quivering effect as the sun (dis)appears.

The surface awareness was common to many artists in the 1920s. The sculptor Jiang Xiaojian whose work I discussed in Chapter 3, was extremely invested in surface complexity in his book cover design for Xu Zhimo’s prose collection entitled *Self-Dissection* (*Zipou* 自剖). Published in 1928, the cover features a face splinted in half by a slim red triangle amidst cluttered vegetal forms rendered in undulating lines and leaf-like shapes (figure 4.12). The shaded areas no longer correspond to the comparative darkness caused by light, or shadows of colors as to offer an illusion of volume. They themselves occupy the same plane as the positive colors of black, red and green. In certain areas, he would confound several depths or layers. For instance, as the black semi-circles meet the left side of the figure’s head by the glasses, it is suddenly replaced by the shaded grey that continues to complete the trefoil overlapping the face. Half of the nose is drawn with black line while the other half fades out into the same grey. But this is by no means done consistently. The mouth of the figure, for example, is painted with the same red on both sides of the split. By stacking and slicing up different planes of shades and colors, the cover’s kaleidoscopic surface translates the underlying literature’s desire to deepen

⁵⁴ Jonathan Hay, *Sensuous Surface: The Decorative Object in Early Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2010), 91.

and dissect the self, as suggested by the title, into a surface visual conceit of opacity and transparency.

The recently edited volume *Surface and Deep Histories: Critique and Practices in Art, Architecture and Design* traces contemporary discursive development of surface consciousness. Today's technological imperatives further intensify the concern over surface. In positing the relationship between surface the visibility, Anuradha Chatterjee suggests that since surface is a requisite for the operation of vision, it is also the cause of vision's obscurity, uncertainty, and opacity.⁵⁵ As the material boundary between literary imagination and the real world, the face of the book becomes the coating of new Chinese literature. In 1926, El Lissitzky claimed that if posters were to be reproduced in the size of a manageable book, then arranged according to theme and bound, the result could be the most original book.⁵⁶ The modern book, according to Lissitzky, must possess posters' visual immediacy and ability to communicate information quickly to the masses. Lissitzky was eventually hoping for an outright abandonment of the codex book form. Before technology could catch up, however, the surface design of the book had to be the most important factor in conditioning the notion of modern readership.

The surface serves as advertisement inducing imaginations and expectations for the underlying literature. As discussed in Chapter 1, Lu Xun's desire to bring the unwritable to the surface compromises the book cover's "poster" effect. *Big Red Robe*, cover design for *Hometown*, is simultaneously a surface, a frame, a stage. The design collapses several layers of depth on the

⁵⁵ Anuradha Chatterjee ed., *Surface and Deep Histories: Critiques and Practices in Art, Architecture and Design* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 5.

⁵⁶ El Lissitzky, "Our Book," in Helen Armstrong ed., *Graphic Design Theory: Readings from the Field* (New York: Princeton Architecture Press, 2009), 25-31.

flat surface. While fully planted in the black soil, the figure's robe and the semi-spherical boots are not connected, leaving a space through which the black soil comes through. The black soil, therefore, is both underneath and behind, while also rising to enclose the figure. The uneven and jagged edges of the black frame give it a bristling and torn effect. Endless connections could be made between the sword, the black soil, and the white specks scattered therein. The title of the book interposes between the tip of the sword and the soil, further dramatizing the potential relationships between each component of the design.

The decision to convert the painting into the cover of a not-yet-written book is remarkable since it reverses the conventional idea that the book cover should function as illustration of the content. For the first time in the history of modern Chinese literature, the book became subservient to the image that adorns it. Tao Yuanqing habitually signed his name on the liminal border, the partition between the white and the black. The artist's signature "Yuanqing" dwarfs the author's name, "Qinwen," printed horizontally beneath the title. The literary component underneath serving as physical body for the surface allowed the surface to circulate and leave greater impact. As a painting, the work would be forever subjected to conventional interpretive efforts, its surface merit unable to emerge. Ultimately, it is the book that bestows the surface status onto the design. Surface is thus both surface and essence.

Conclusion

Early 20th-century China witnessed an important re-canonization of Chinese art. The vehement attack on the literati painting tradition, particularly the uncreative revival of Song and pre-Song dynasty painting throughout Chinese art history, brought about a re-orientation towards the past for alternative models and inspirations. A new group of Qing dynasty painters became idolized and essentially still dominates the aesthetics of Chinese art today. The list includes Zhu Da (1626-1705), Shitao (1642-1707), and Gao Qipei (1660-1734), often known as the “individualist,” and commercial painters represented by the Eight Eccentrics of Yangzhou and the Shanghai School painters.¹ In Qing China, the term *qishi*, literally “strange gentlemen” or “originals,” was applied to artists who shared a self-conscious claim to difference.² These unorthodox painters, rather than being driven by a concern with reproducing the natural world, shifted their interest to a desire to visualize personal experiences. Be it Gao Qipei’s idiosyncratic painting with fingers, Zhu Da’s fish and rocks suspended in mid-air and morphing into each other, or Shitao’s anti-aesthetic painting *Ten Thousand Ugly Ink Dots*, their willful difference from canonical norms was ironically re-incarnated as an inspiring norm in the early 20th century.³

¹ For a discussion on the re-canonization of Chinese art history in early 20th century, see Lang Shaojun, *Zhongguo xiandai meishu lilun piping wencong*, Lang Shaojun juan (Beijing: Renmin meishu chubanshe, 2010), 155-181.

² Jonathan Hay, *Shitao: Painting and Modernity in Early Qing China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), xv.

³ The singularity of the so called “individualist” has been challenged by recent scholars such as Jonathan Hay, Klaas Ruitenbeek, and Alan Yeung. The perceived eccentricity of these artists is in fact manifestation of much more general tendencies towards self-consciousness over the course of the 17th century in China.

In light of the re-invented lineage of unorthodox “eccentrics,” Tao Yuanqing’s art—his commitment to unseriousness, to irony and humor, his contempt for anatomy and fondness of the amorphous, his systematic yet casual borrowing of historical references, and interests in counterintuitive surface quality—seems all very fitting for the period. But it actually took the 1920s by surprise. Eccentricity was not the paradigm in Republican China. The desire to create something visually new was then the priority for every artist, and design represented a promising medium to achieve such goal. I have extensively discussed the early 20th-century’s hierarchy of mediums that championed painting as the medium par excellence for visual expression. Tao Yuanqing’s dedication to design subverts this conviction. The democratization of all visual resources intrinsic to design offered an unlimited repository of images and patterns. The thriving publishing world also demanded unique and attractive cover designs to promote sales. Many, indeed, dabbled in graphic design.⁴ In the dissertation, I mentioned art works by the sculptor Jiang Xiaojian, the architect Liu Jipiao, the reputable painter Lin Fengmian, the cultural figure and Buddhist monk Li Shutong, and our writer Lu Xun. All of them produced book cover designs.

Rather than boosting their artistic career, book cover design seems to have undermined their ambition, with the exception of Lu Xun. As for Tao Yuanqing, the book design project

For monograph on Gao Qipei, see Klaas Ruitenbeek, *Discarding the Brush: Gao Qipei (1660-1734) and the Art of Chinese Finger Painting* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum; Gent: Snoeck-Ducaju & Zoon, 1992).

⁴ I am careful with the usage of the term graphic design as it was often anachronistically used by historians. As pointed out by Stephen Eskilson that it was coined by book and type designer William A. Dwiggins (1880-1956) only in the 1920s, and did not become common parlance in English as an encompassing term for the artful creation of visual communication until much later. Stephen Eskilson, *Graphic Design: A New History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 53.

certainly partook of a global modernist tendency marked by a persistent challenge of tradition through creation of alternative ways of seeing, observing, and experiencing the world. Yet, something bothered him: he displayed an unwillingness to design book covers. His hesitation to commit to a medium to which we now ascribe an avant-garde status complicates his position as an unconventional artist. It is not a clean-edged avant-garde affair. His lack of enthusiasm implies an internal tension between a desire for the visual attention being the end in itself and an aversion to the utilitarianism inherent in cover art. Tao Yuanqing was undoubtedly a staunch proponent of design, but while Lu Xun's fame lent a great popularity to his art, the spotlight also compromised the intrinsic visual appeal Tao Yuanqing wished to achieve with design. Consider the large spaces he habitually leaves unpainted in his designs. The empty space seemed only natural in design, leaving space for the insertion of the book's title and the author's name. When he produced the same visual effect in his painting, however, it was taken as a subversive move by critics.⁵ Despite his liberty to create covers unrelated to the underlying literary content, the inseverable connection between word and image, face and body would always confine his visual ambition.

Lu Xun, on the other hand, known for his vivid and graphic literary imagination, was seeking an artist who could meet him half way. It is not too much to imagine that, had Lu Xun met Tao Yuanqing earlier, his first short story collection *Nahan* (Call to Arms) which includes his "Hometown" would have had the chance to "wear" *Big Red Robe* as its cover instead of Xu Qinwen's *Hometown* from 1925. Lu Xun also had to be realistic with his ambitions. He asked for

⁵ Xu Qinwen, "Tao Yuanqing and his painting," in *Xu Qinwen sanwen ji*, 339.

more cover designs than he actually received from the artist. He often sent a request to multiple artists hoping that one would agree to collaborate. It was not until after the late 1920s that private publishing houses began to commission a regular artist to design covers for all of their publications. Tao Yuanqing's friend Qian Juntao, for instance, regularly produced cover designs for literary books published by the Kaiming Book Company. Another popular graphic artist, Chen Zhifo, was associated with Tianma Book Company and Dadong Book Company in Shanghai. The neat professionalization between writers, publishers, and artists in the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s lacks the kind of dissonance, asymmetry, and contingencies seen in the early and mid-1920s. What was initiated by Lu Xun and Tao Yuanqing evolved into a common practice. Following Lu Xun's special request, every book for which Tao Yuanqing designed the cover features a separate page in the beginning to acknowledge the artist's creation. Lu Xun went further to brand the artist by using his name as a selling point for anticipated publications listed at the back of each book. For books published in 1930s when cover designing became increasingly standardized and systemized, names of the artist responsible for the cover design were rarely mentioned, a fact that makes identifying the artists impossible today.

The dissertation title "The Writer's Art" is thus an enabling notion to capture the rich dynamics of this writer-painter collaboration in the 1920s. Rather than attributing certain phenomenon to the individual agency of Lu Xun or Tao Yuanqing, I explore the intersubjective community between writers, artists, and other intellectuals. Behind the visual excitement of these book covers lie cycles of hesitations, compromises, noncompliances, and alterations. The idea echoes part of Bruno Latour's formulation of the action in his actor-network theory. Action,

he argues, far from being a coherent, controlled, well-rounded, and clean-edged affair, is by definition dislocated. Action is borrowed, distributed, suggested, influenced, dominated, betrayed, translated.⁶ Neither was the artist or the writer a self-sufficient agent in the process. Their coming together brought about new possibilities that surpassed what either could have imagined. Tao Yuanqing had little faith in the medium of the book, but he possessed the uncanny ability—a graphic sensitivity and an ironic attitude—to give form to ambiguity, which in turn engendered the most exciting and frustrating associative thinking of the period.

Precisely because so many factors were at play to allow for such unconventional artistic practice and that Tao Yuanqing was not particularly interested in placing himself into history, he enjoyed little legacy in the subsequent period. It was not until the current design boom in China spurred by economic growth that he was resurrected as one of the originators of Chinese modern design. Yet, legacy should not be conceived solely as the province of master painters while the narrative of master painters itself is subjected to revision. The story of the Tao Yuanqing-Lu Xun collaboration and the ease with which Tao Yuanqing broke free of prevailing forms leaves an important, if largely unknown, legacy. Whenever an artist creates compelling works that disrupt coherent thinking with a seeming ease, there exists then an untold affinity with the history this dissertation examines. It is fortunate that Tao Yuanqing's works were preserved in print, allowing this story to be pieced together, and providing new insight into one of the most formative periods in Chinese art.

⁶ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 46.

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Appendix—Tao Yuanqing's Chronology

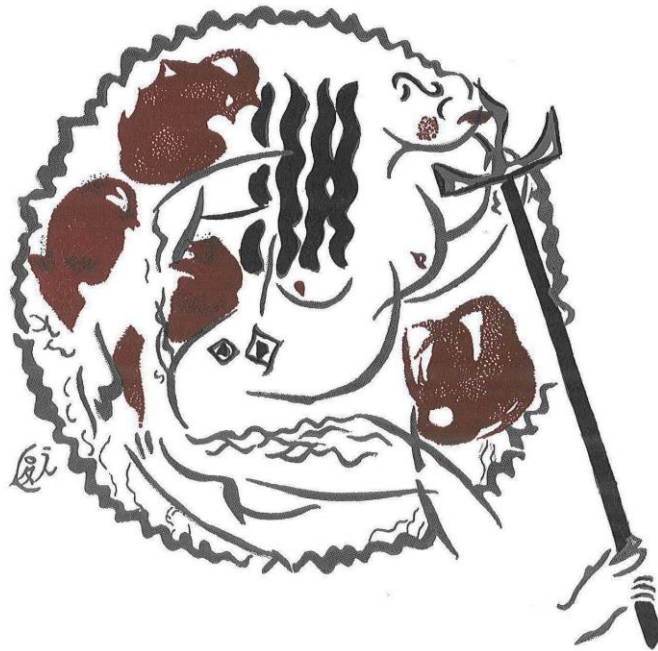
- 1893 Born in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province.
- 1913 Enrolled at the Fifth Normal School in Shaoxing, Zhejiang Province. After graduation remained as teacher at the school.
- 1921 Entered Shanghai Fine Arts School. Studied oil-painting with Chen Baoyi.
- 1923 Worked as graphic artist at Eastern Times in Shanghai.
- 1924 Arrival in Beijing on July 7. Encounter with Lu Xun. First design *Symbols of Depression*.
- 1925 First exhibition in Beijing on March 18 and 19. Began teaching at Taizhou No.6 Middle School in Zhejiang Province.
- 1926 Returned to Beijing in the summer after leaving teaching position at Taizhou. Began teaching painting at Shanghai Lida School.
- 1928 Began teaching at the First National Art Academy in Hangzhou.
- 1929 Death in Hangzhou on August 6.

Figures



Figure 1

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Guxiang (Hometown) by Xu Qinwen*, published by Beixin Book Company, May 1925.



微象的悶苦

譯迅魯 著村白川廚

Figure 2

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Kumen de xiangzheng (Symbols of Depression)* by Kuriyagawa Hakuson, translated by Lu Xun, published by Xinchao Society, December 1924.



Figure 3

Photograph of Students at the Shanghai Fine Arts School, 1930.



Figure 4

Ding Song, *Cover design of Saturday, issue 104*, published by Shanghai zhonghua Library, 1921.

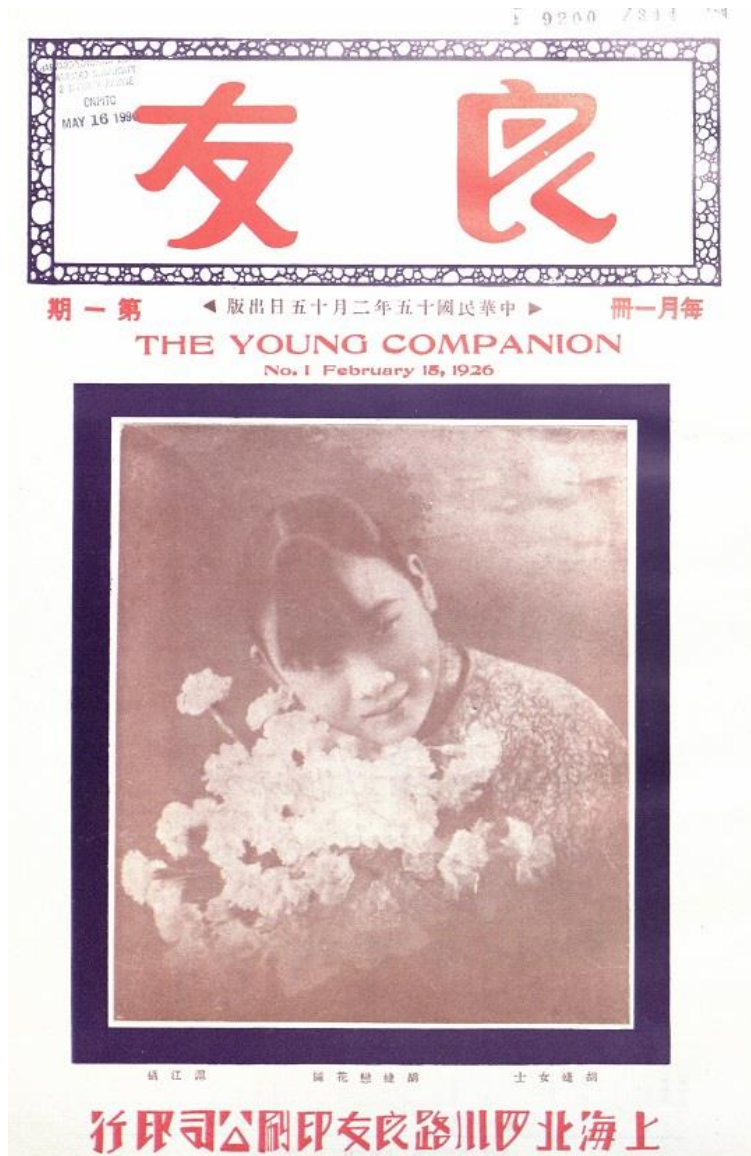


Figure 5

Cover of *Young Companion*, First issue, published by Shanghai Liangyou Printing Company, February 15, 1926.

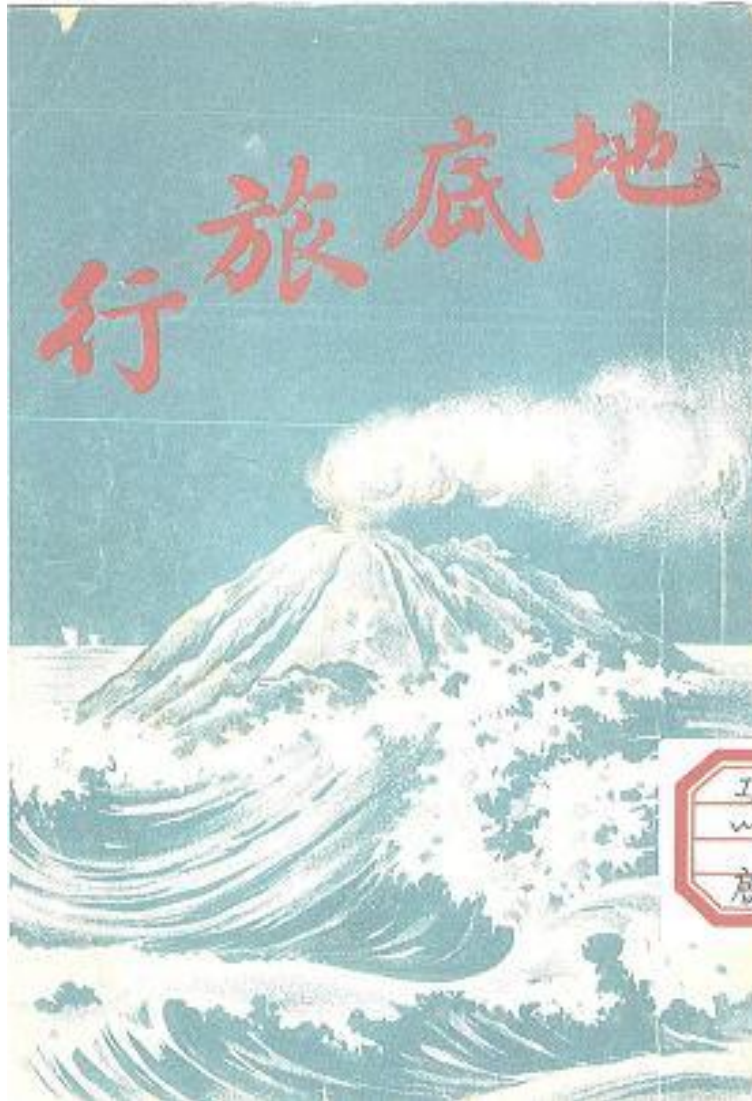


Figure 1.1

Cover of Didi lǚxing (Voyage au Centre de la Terre) by Jules Verne, translated by Lu Xun, published by Puji Book Company, 1906.



Figure 1.2

Cover of Dixin lüxing (Voyage au Centre de la Terre) by Jules Verne, published by Guangzhi Book Company, 1906.

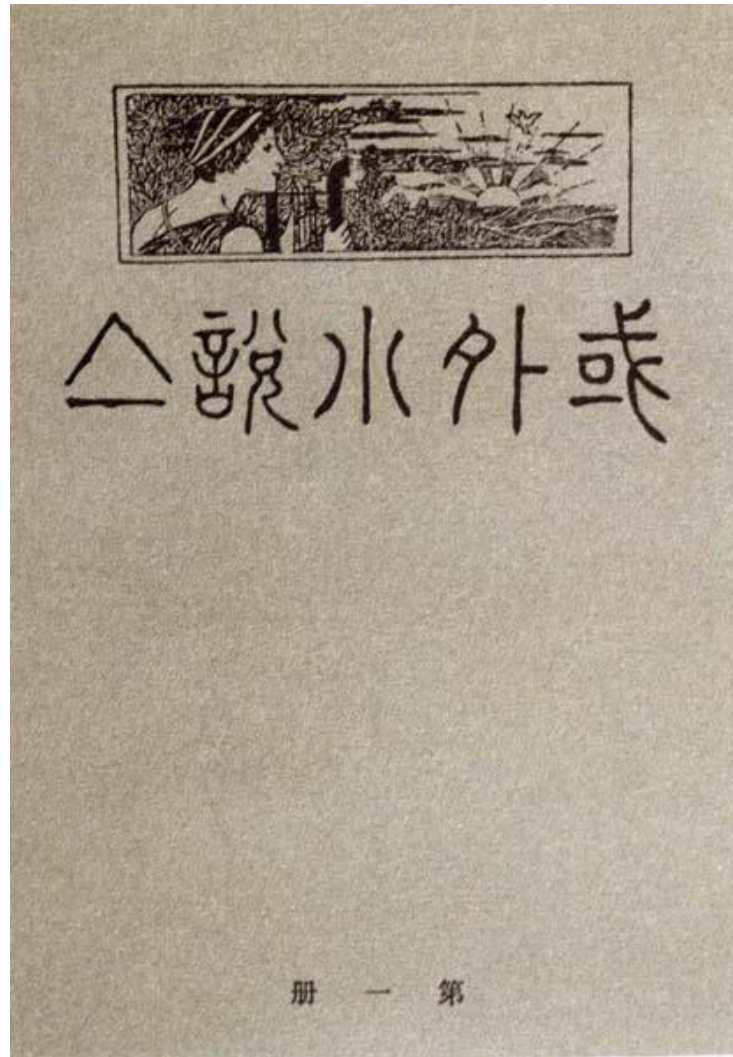


Figure 1.3

Lu Xun and Chen Shizeng, *Cover design of Yuwai xiaoshuo ji (Collected Stories from Abroad) by Zhou Shuren (Lu Xun) and Zhou Zuoren*, published in Tokyo, 1909.

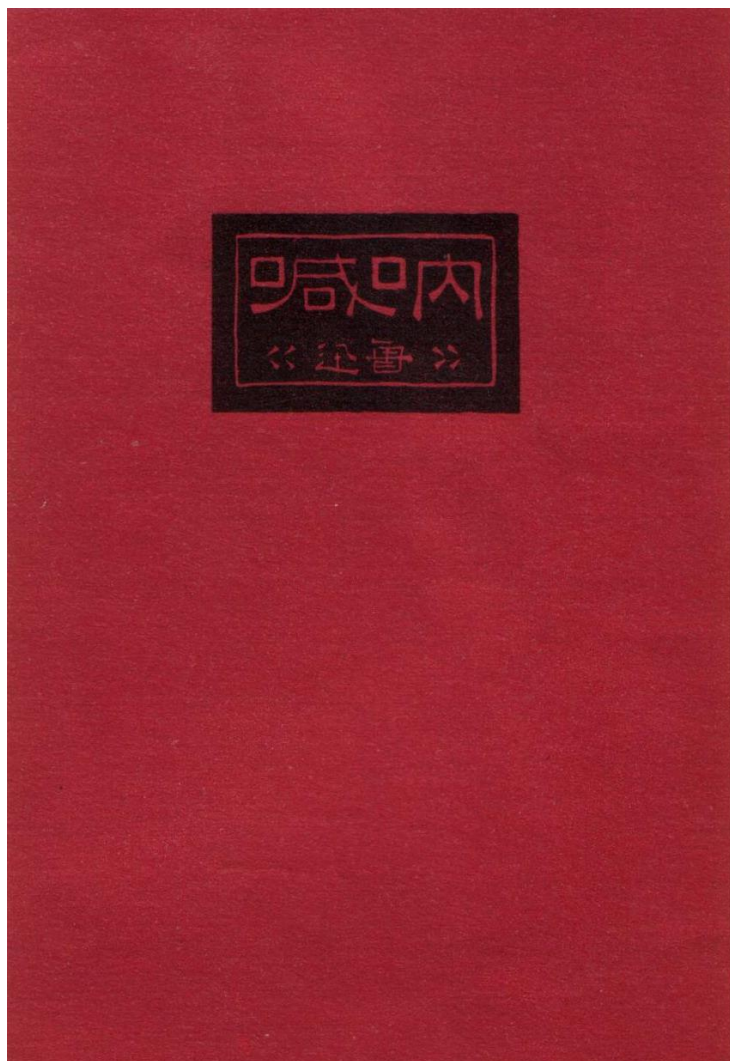


Figure 1.4

Lu Xun, *Cover design of Nahan (Call to Arms) by Lu Xun*, published by Beixin Book Company, 1924.

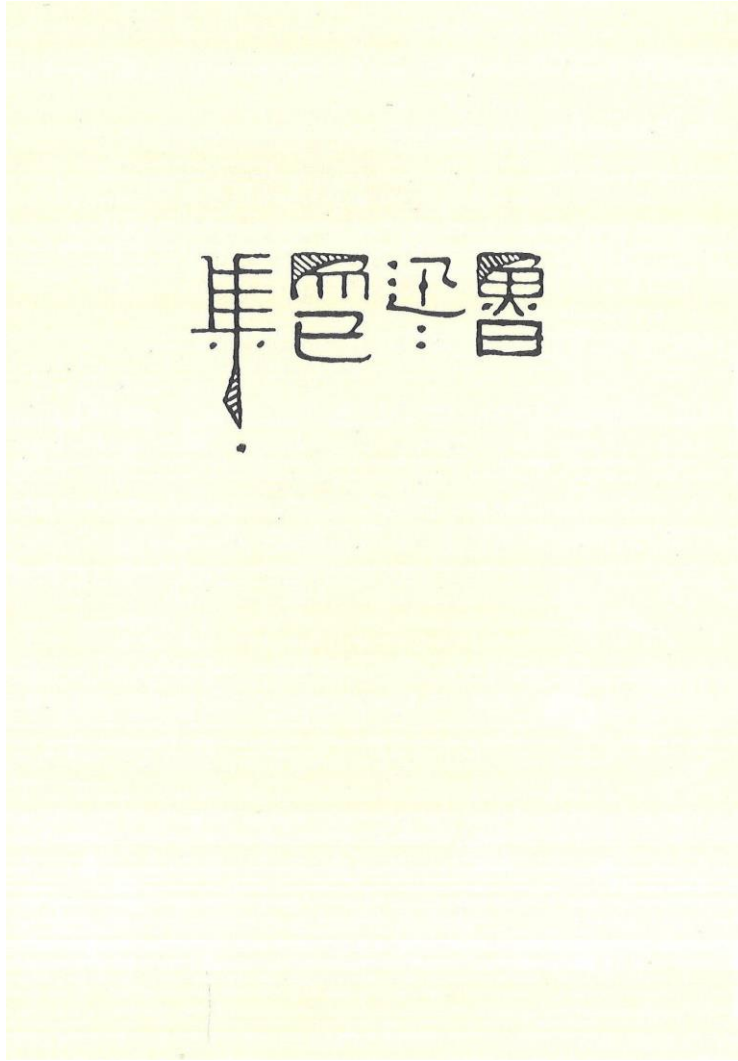


Figure 1.5

Lu Xun, *Cover design of Er yi ji (And That's That) by Lu Xun*, published by Beixin Book Company, 1928.



Figure 1.6

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Zhaohua xishi (Dawn Blossoms Plucked at Dusk) by Lu Xun*, published by Weiming Society, 1928.

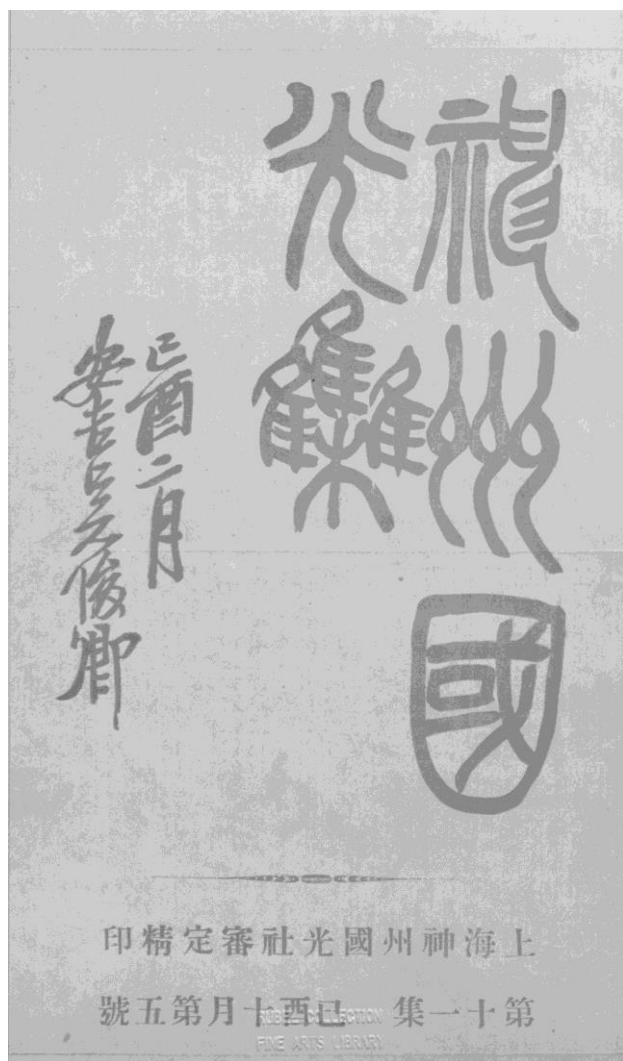


Figure 1.7

Wu Changshi, *Cover calligraphy of Shen Zhou Guo Guang Ji (Chinese National Glory)*, vol. 11, no. 5, published by Shanghai Shen Zhou Guo Guang She, 1909.

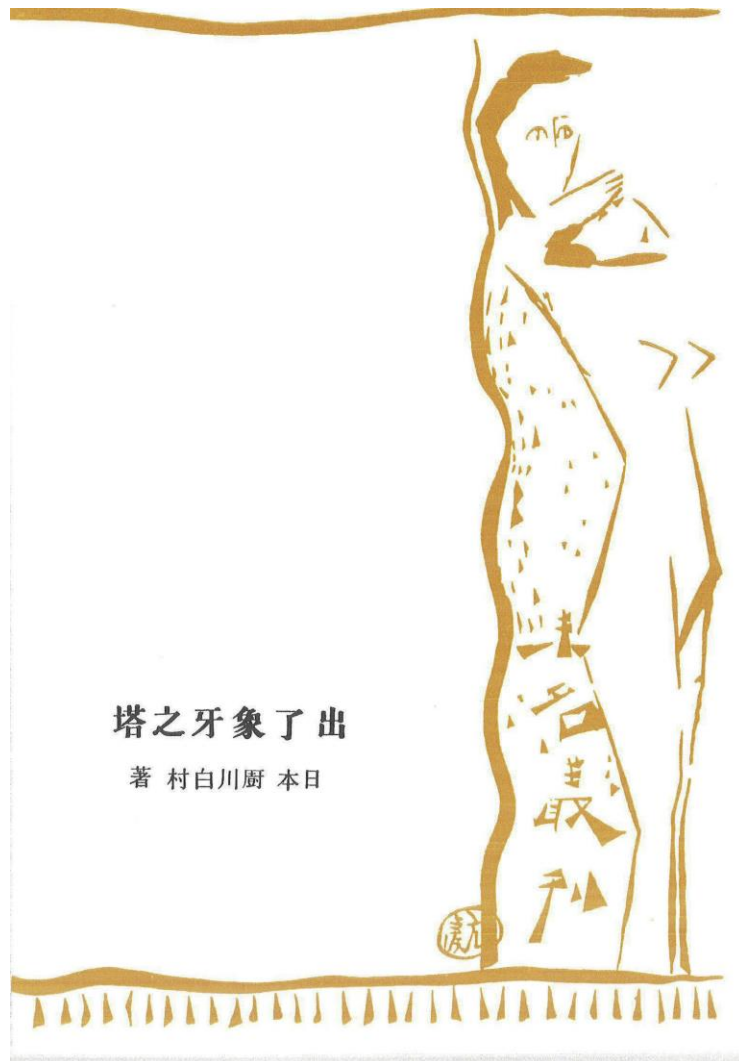


Figure 1.8

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Chule xiangya zhi ta (Out of the Ivory Tower) by Kuriyagawa Hakuson, translated by Lu Xun, published by Weiming Society, 1925.*

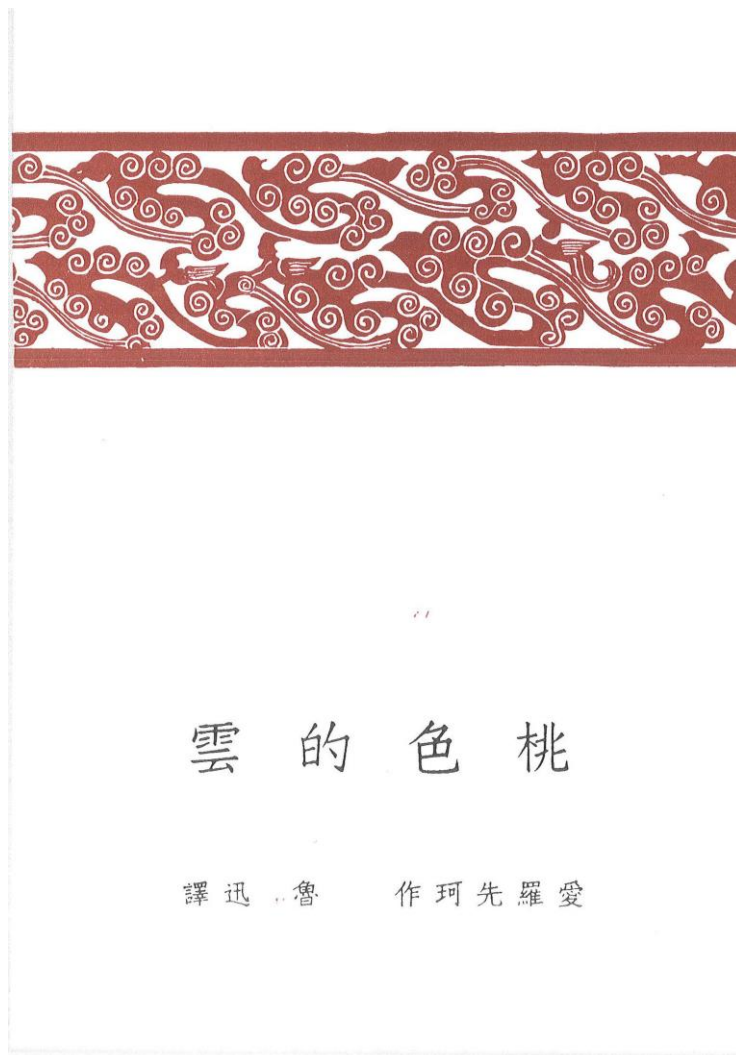


Figure 1.9

Lu Xun, *Cover design of Tao se de yun (The Pink Cloud) by Vasili Eroshenko*, translated by Lu Xun, published by Xinchao Society, 1923.

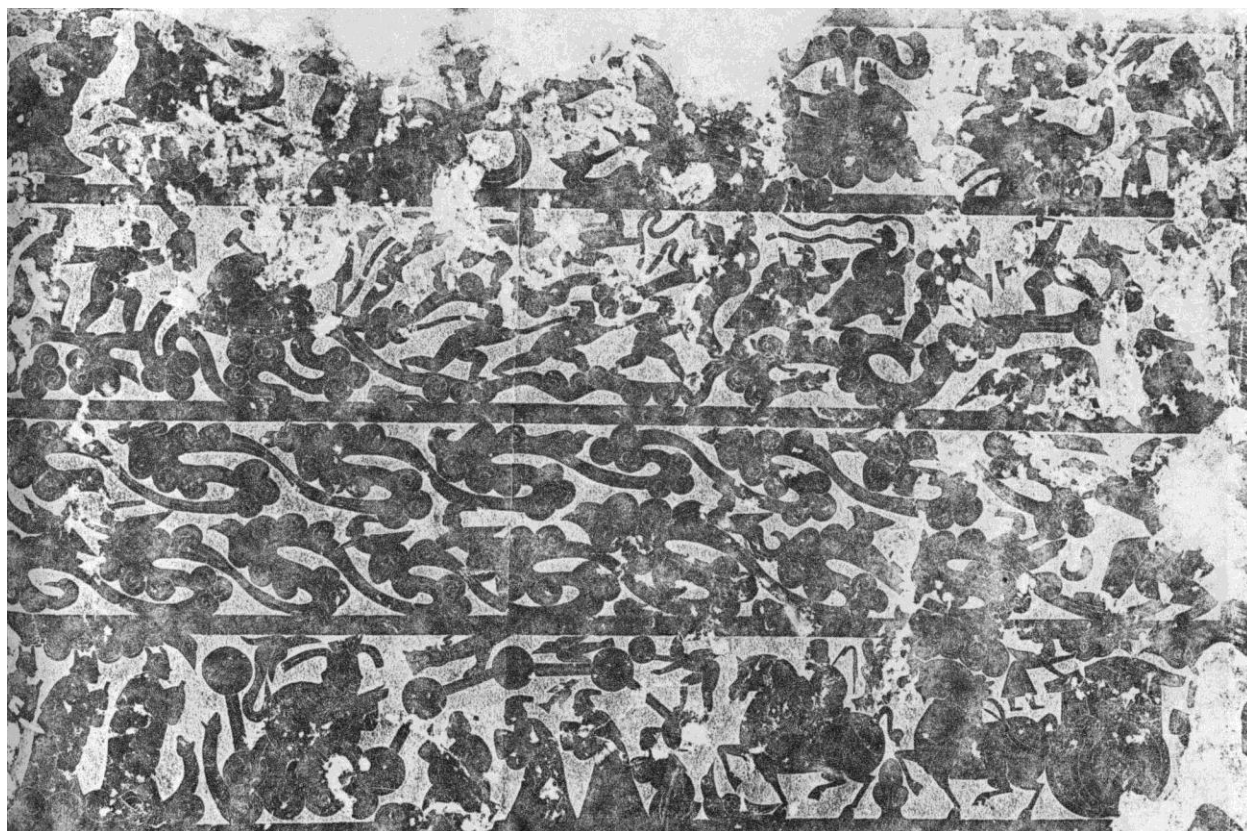


Figure 1.10

Ink rubbing of carvings from Wu Family Shrine in Jiexiang, collected by Lu Xun, undated.



Figure 1.11

Lu Xun, *Cover design of Guoxue jikan (National Learning Quarterly)*, edited by Gu Jiegang, published by Peking University, 1923.



Figure 1.12

Illustration page in Shenzhou guoguang ji (Chinese National Glory), vol.8, no.2, published by Shanghai shenzhou guoguangshe, 1909.



Figure 1.13

Ding Song, *Cover design of Libai liu (Saturday)*, no.22, published by Shanghai Zhongguo Book Company, 1914.

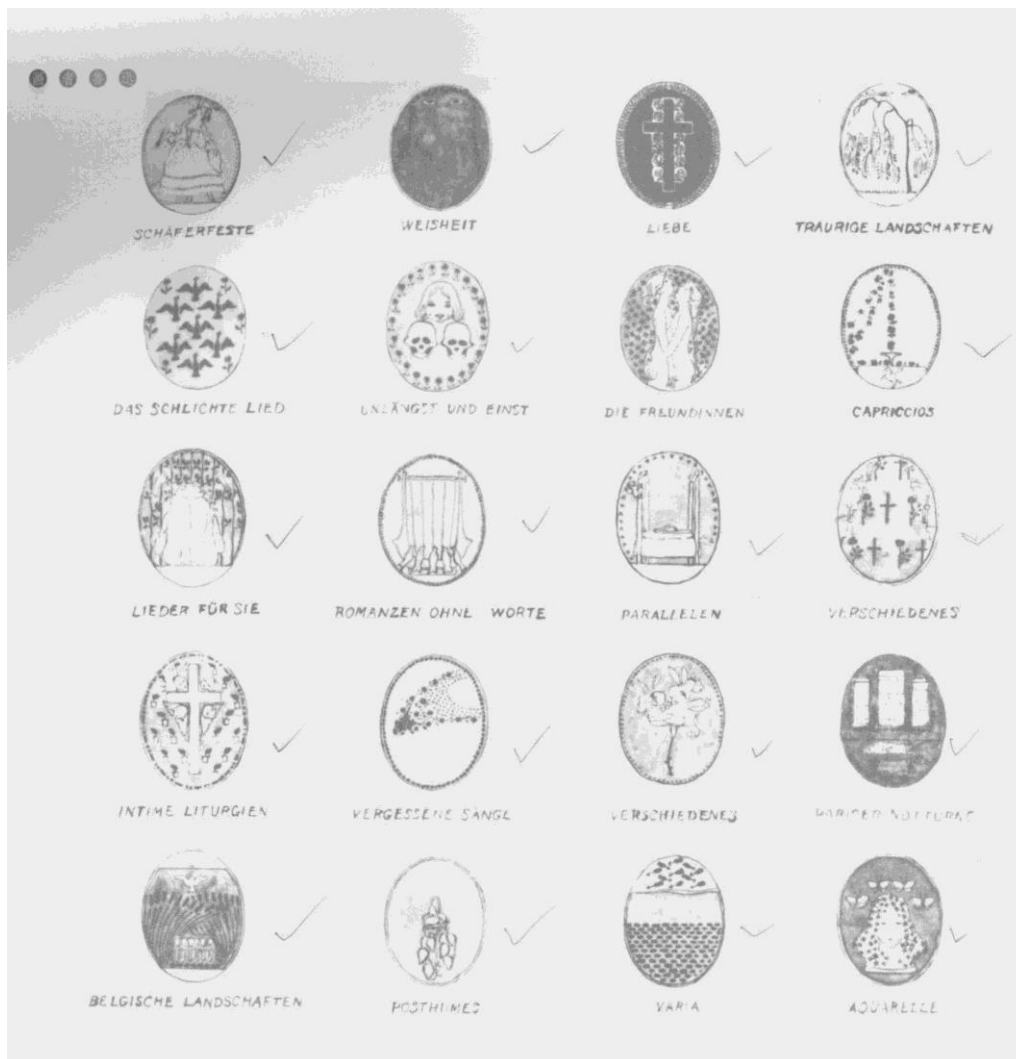


Figure 1.14

Lu Xun, *Vignettes traced from Ausgewählte Gedichte Paul Verlaine*, edited by Graf Wolf v. Kalckreuth, published by Leipzig Insel-Verlag, 1906.

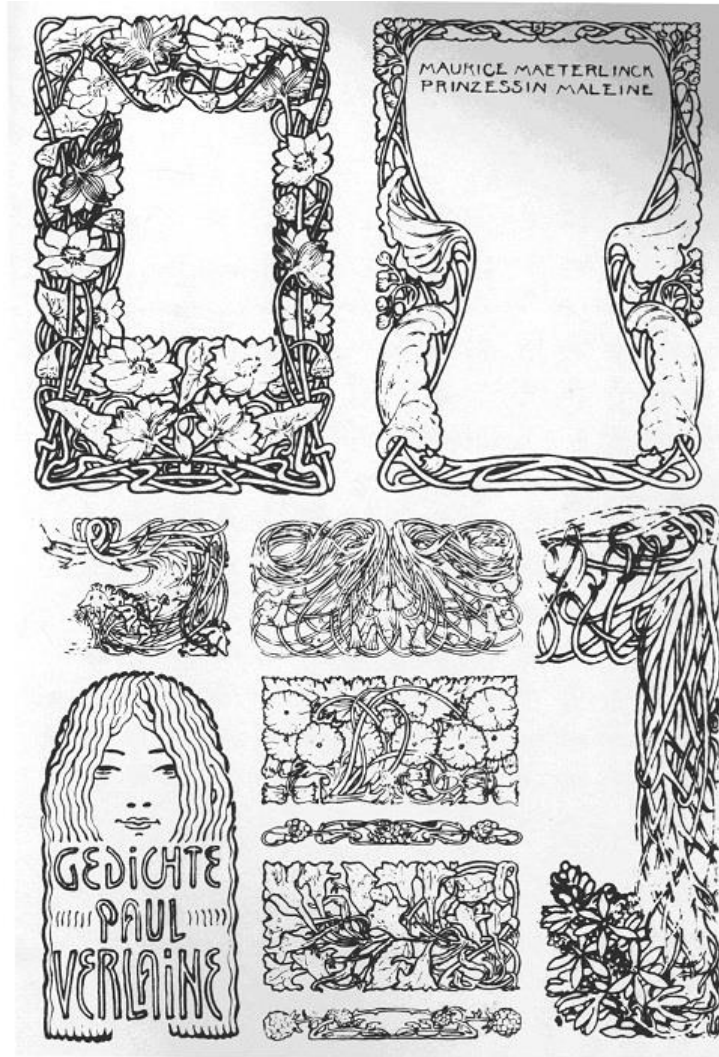


Figure 1.15

Lu Xun, *Border designs traced from Germany publications including the cover of Ausgewählte Gedichte Paul Verlaine*, edited by Graf Wolk v. Kalckreuth, published by Leipzig Insel-Verlag, 1906.

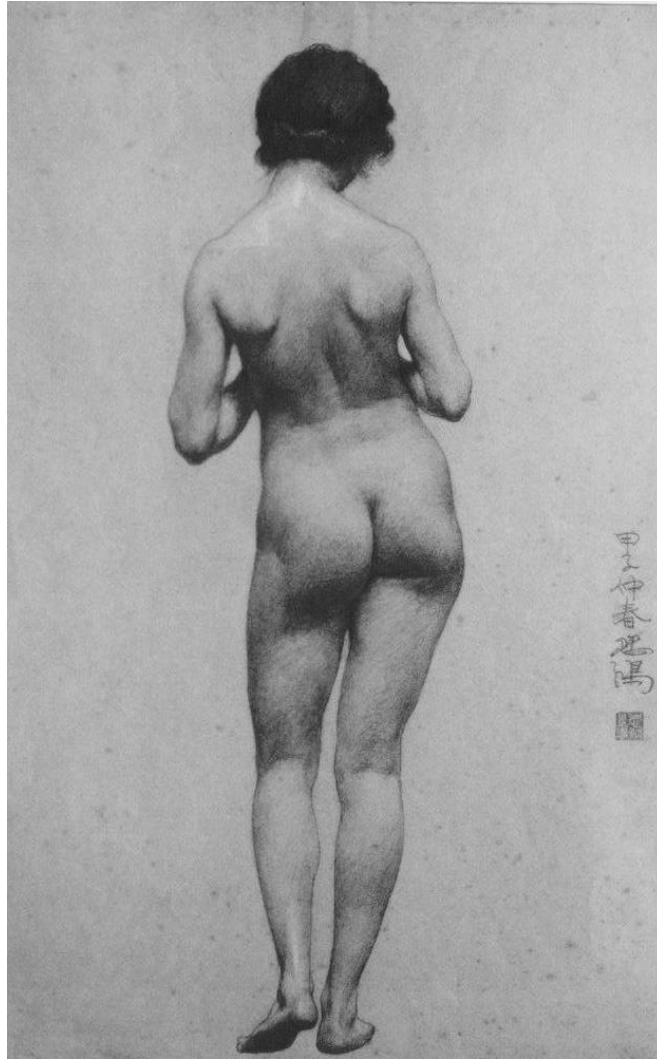


Figure 1.16

Xu Beihong, *Female Nude*, charcoal and white chalk on paper, 50 x 32 cm, Xu Beihong Memorial Museum Beijing, 1924.



Figure 1.17

Dan Duyu, *Page from Shizhuang Duyu baimeitu zheng ji (Duyu's Fashionable One Hundred Beauties)*, published by Shanghai xinmin tushuguan xiongdi gongsi, 1923.

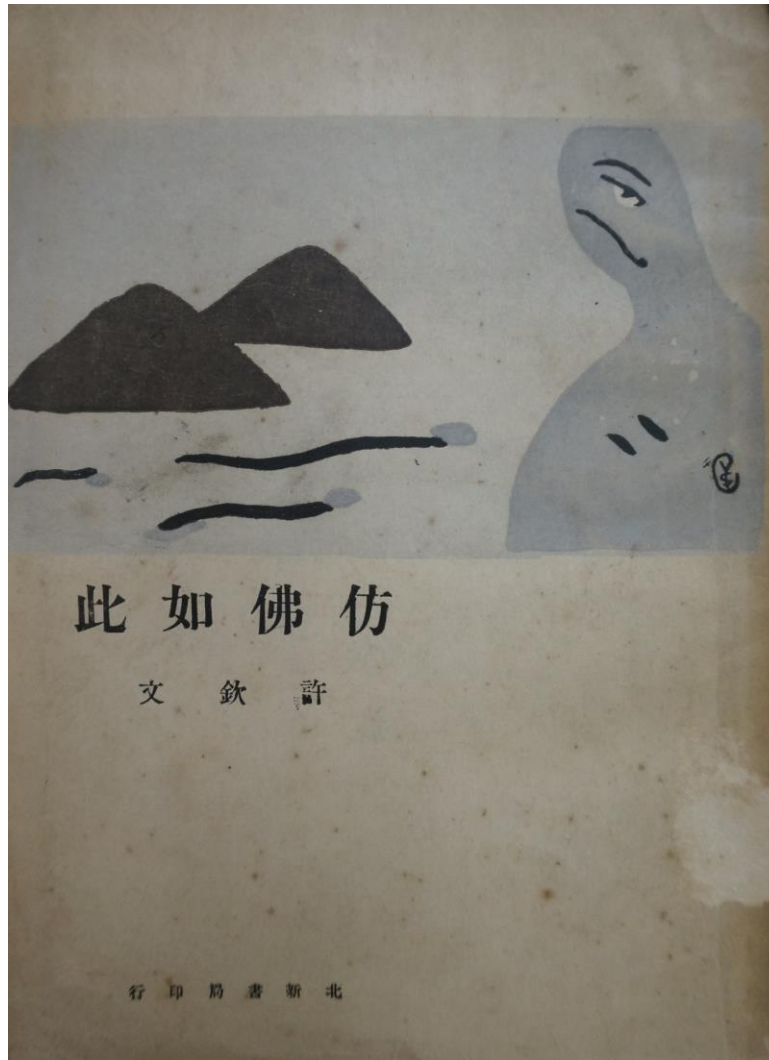


Figure 1.18

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Fangfu ruci (It Seems Like That) by Xu Qinwen*, published by Beixin Book Company, 1928.

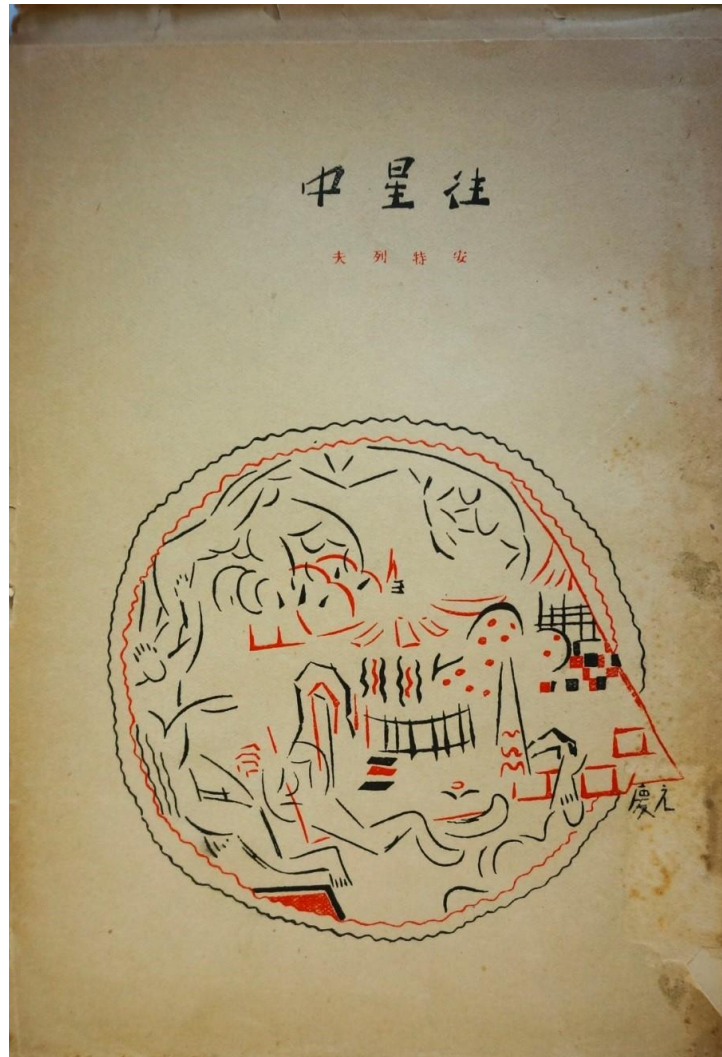


Figure 1.19

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Wang xing zhong (To the Stars) by Leonid Andreyev*, translated by Li Jiye, published by Weiming Society, 1926.

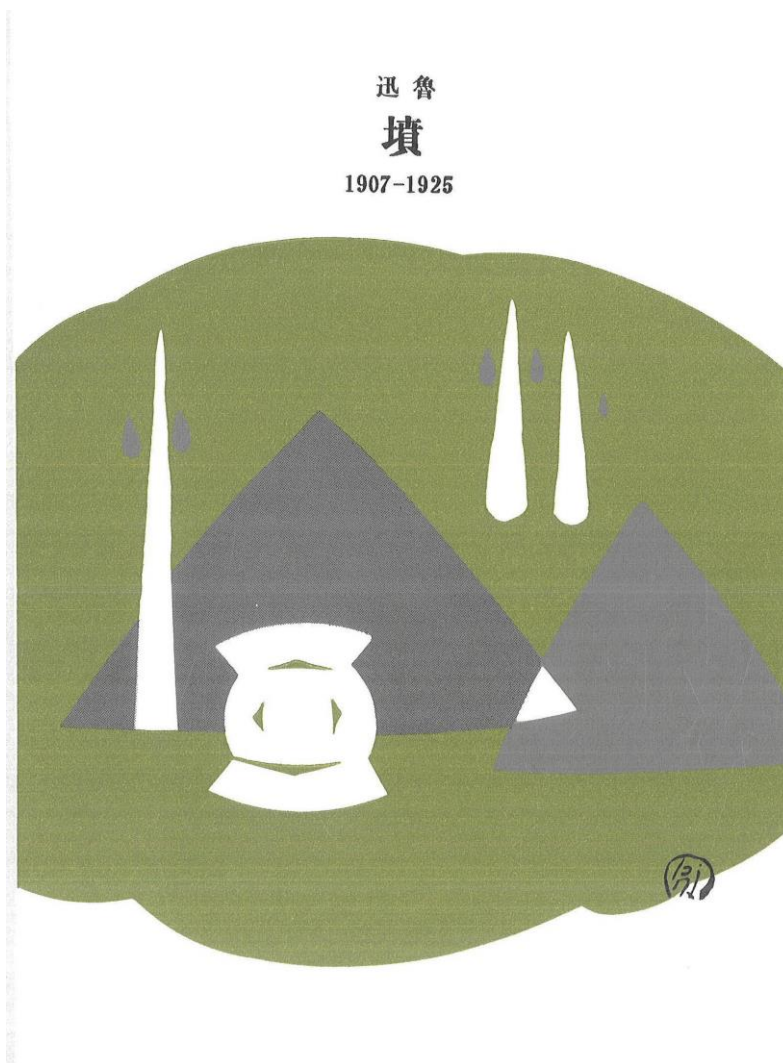


Figure 1.20

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Fen (The Grave) by Lu Xun*, published by Weiming Society, 1927.

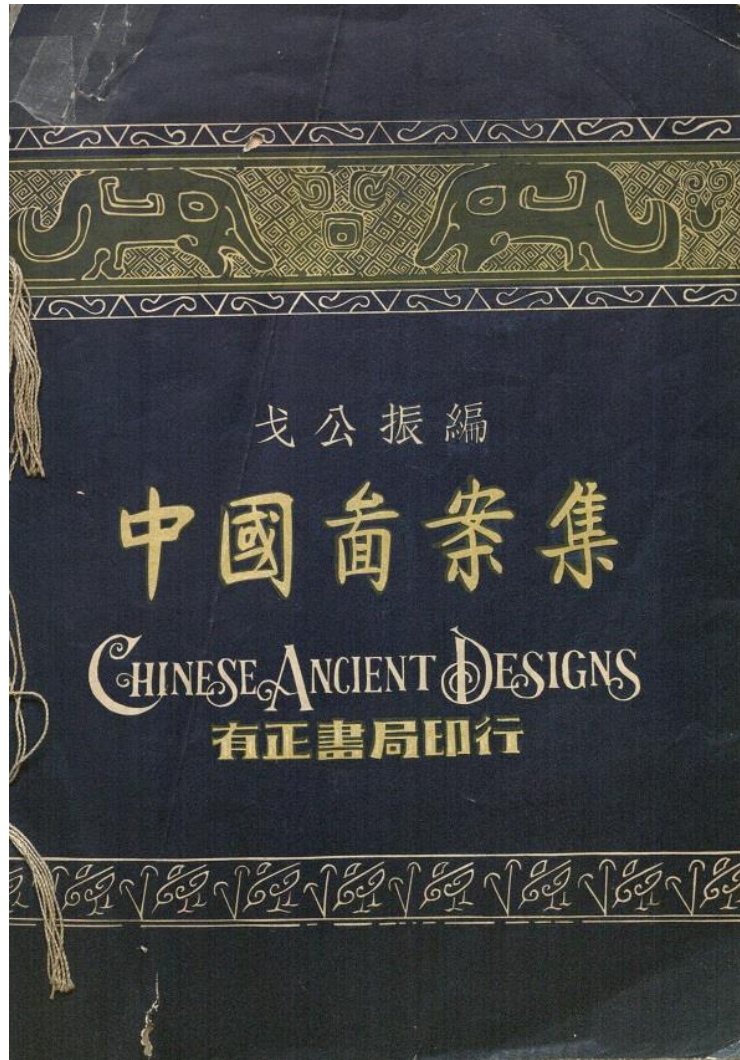


Figure 2.1

Ge Gongzhen, *Chinese Ancient Designs*, published by Shanghai Youzheng Book Company, 1925.

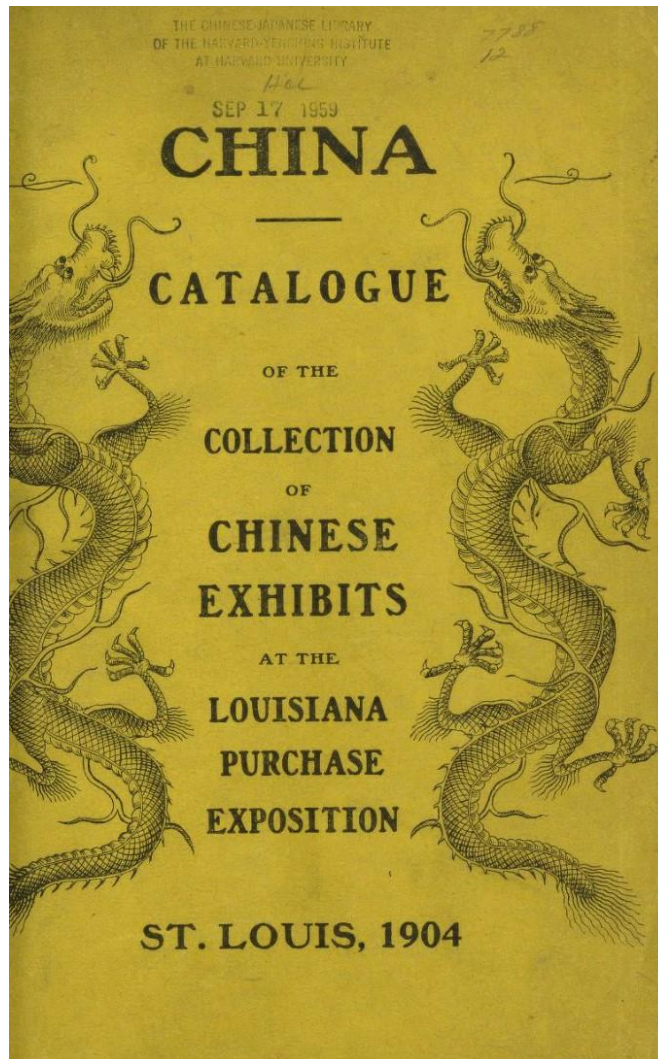


Figure 2.2

Catalogue of the Collection of Chinese Exhibits at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, 1904.

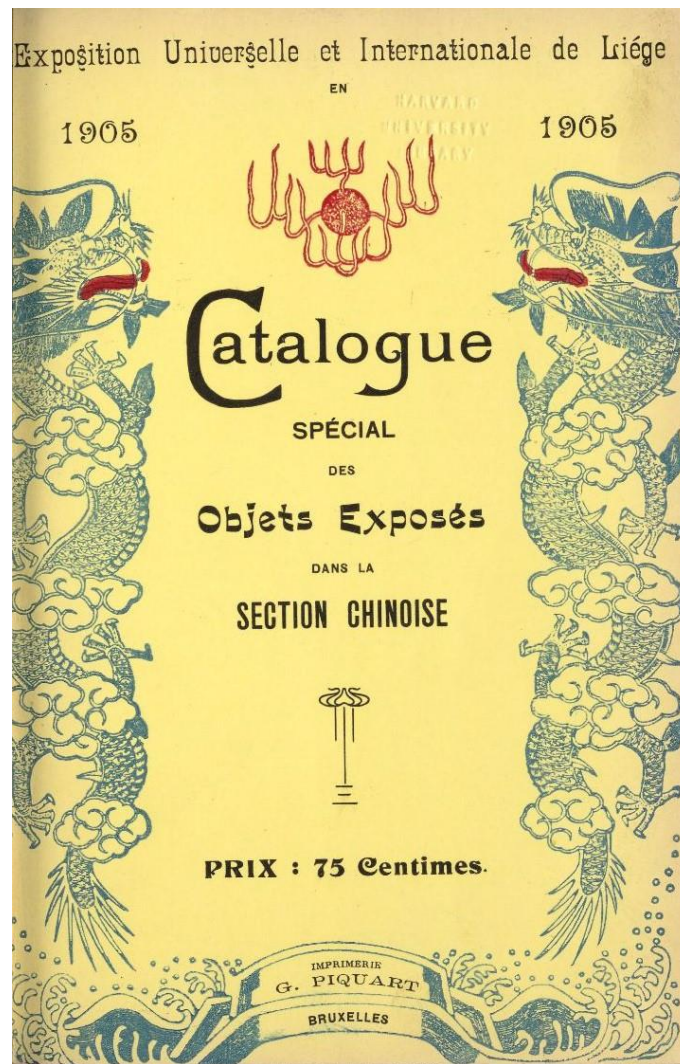


Figure 2.3

Catalogue Spécial des Objets Exposés dans la Section Chinoise, Liège, 1905.

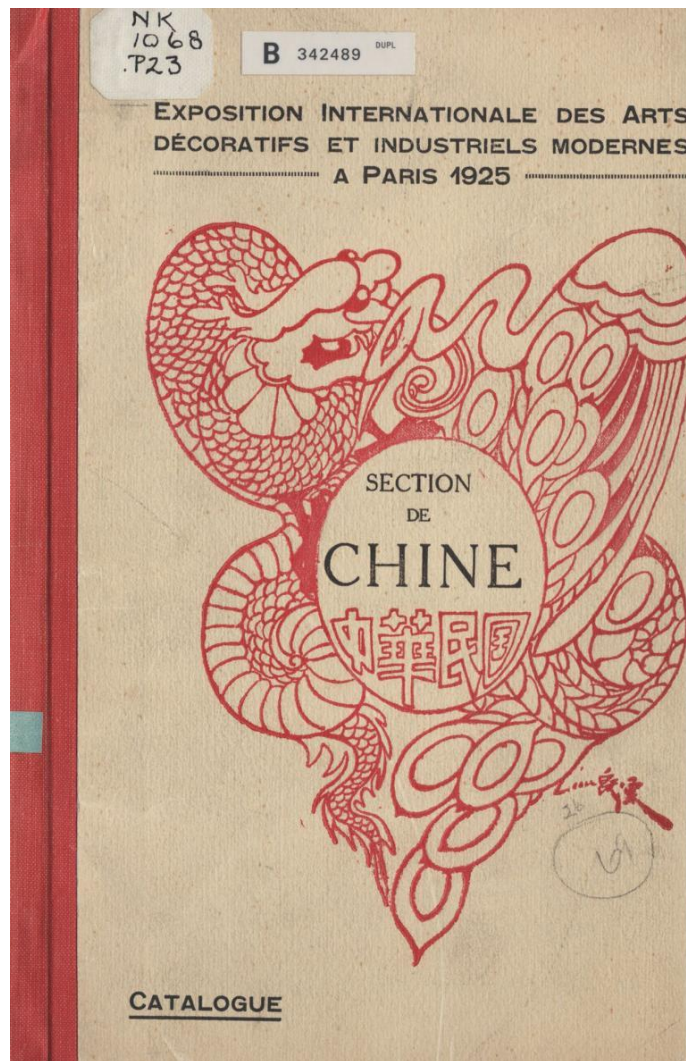


Figure 2.4

Catalogue Section de Chine Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes à Paris, 1925.



Figure 2.5

Rubbing of stone carving of mythical bird from Xinjin cliff tombs, Xinjin County, Sichuan, China, 206 BCE – 220 AD, Han dynasty.

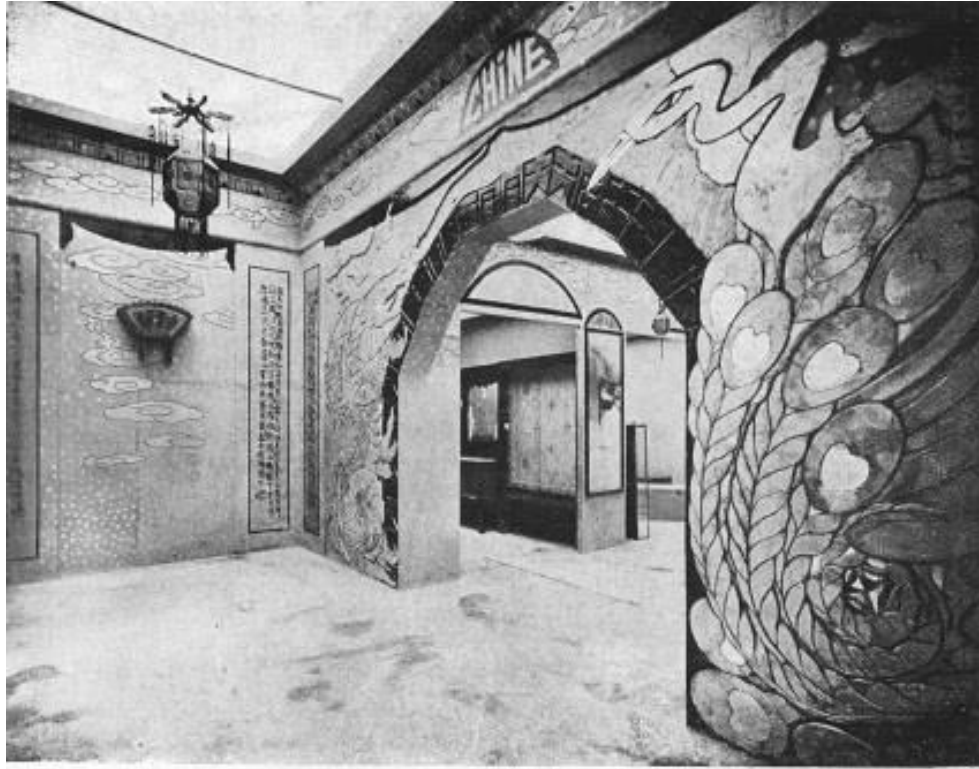


Figure 2.6

Entrance to the Chinese Section, L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes à Paris, 1925.

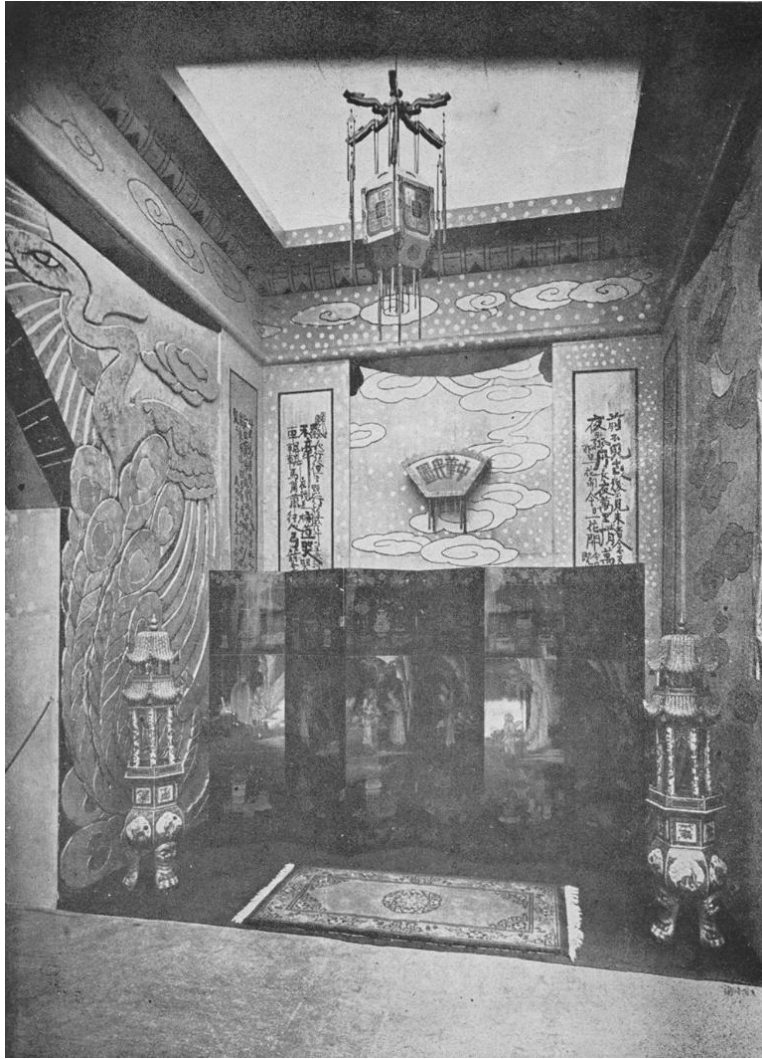


Figure 2. 7

Detail of the Chinese Section, L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes à Paris, 1925.

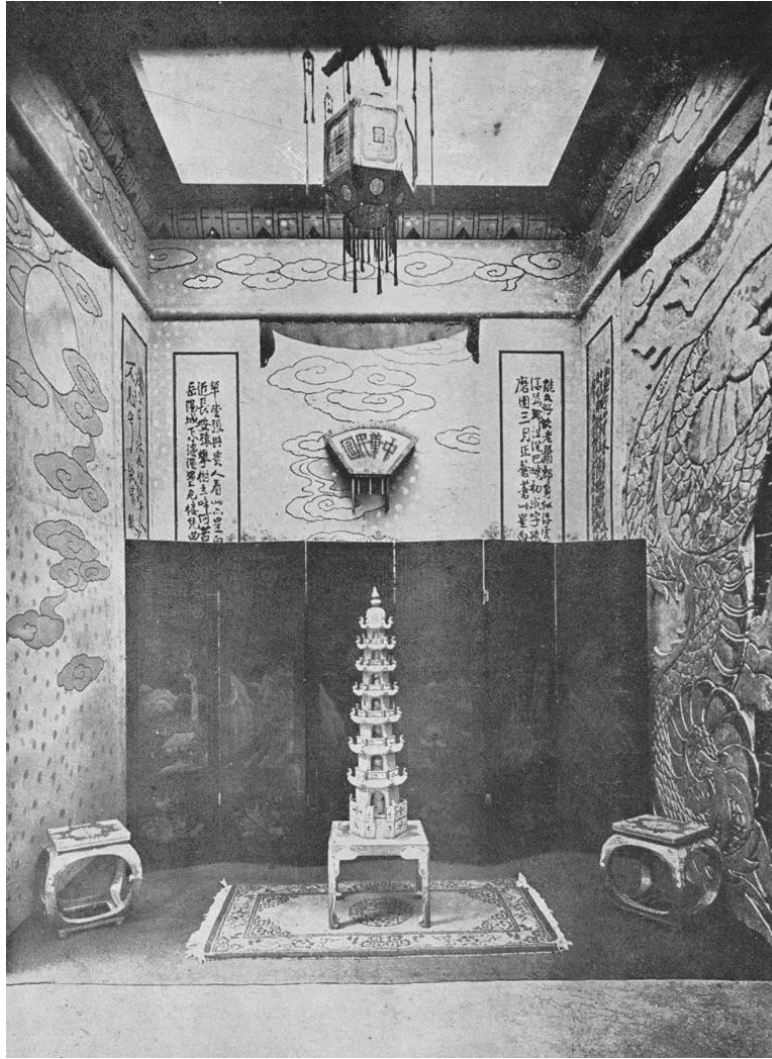


Figure 2.8

Detail of the Chinese Section, L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes à Paris, 1925.

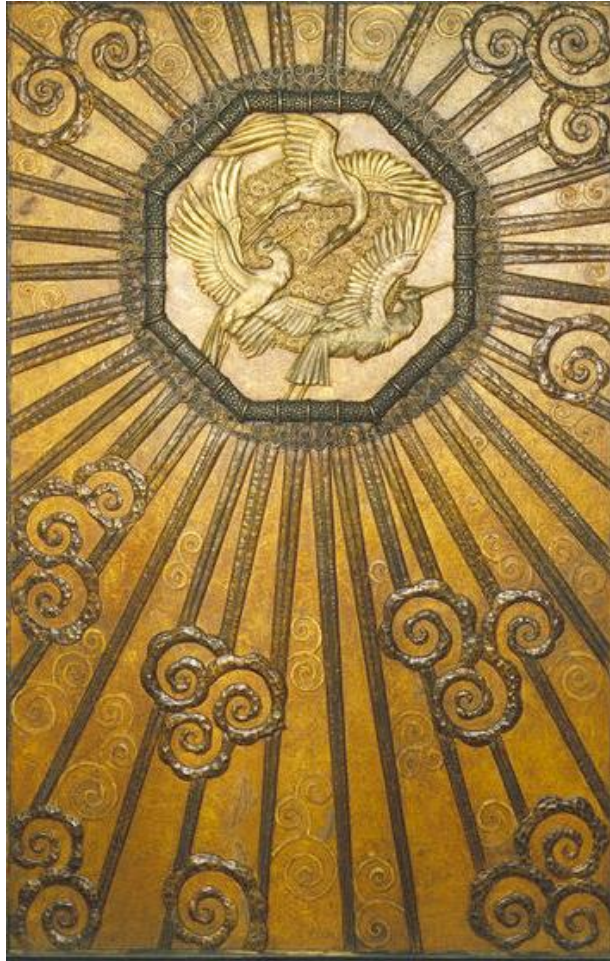


Figure 2.9

Edgar Brandt, *Les Cigognes d'Alsace*, lift panels, lacquer, iron, bronze, and wood, Victoria and Albert Museum, designed in 1922, created for a Selfridges lift cage in 1928.



Figure 2.10

Konstantin Melnikov, *USSR Pavilion*, L'Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes a Paris, 1925.

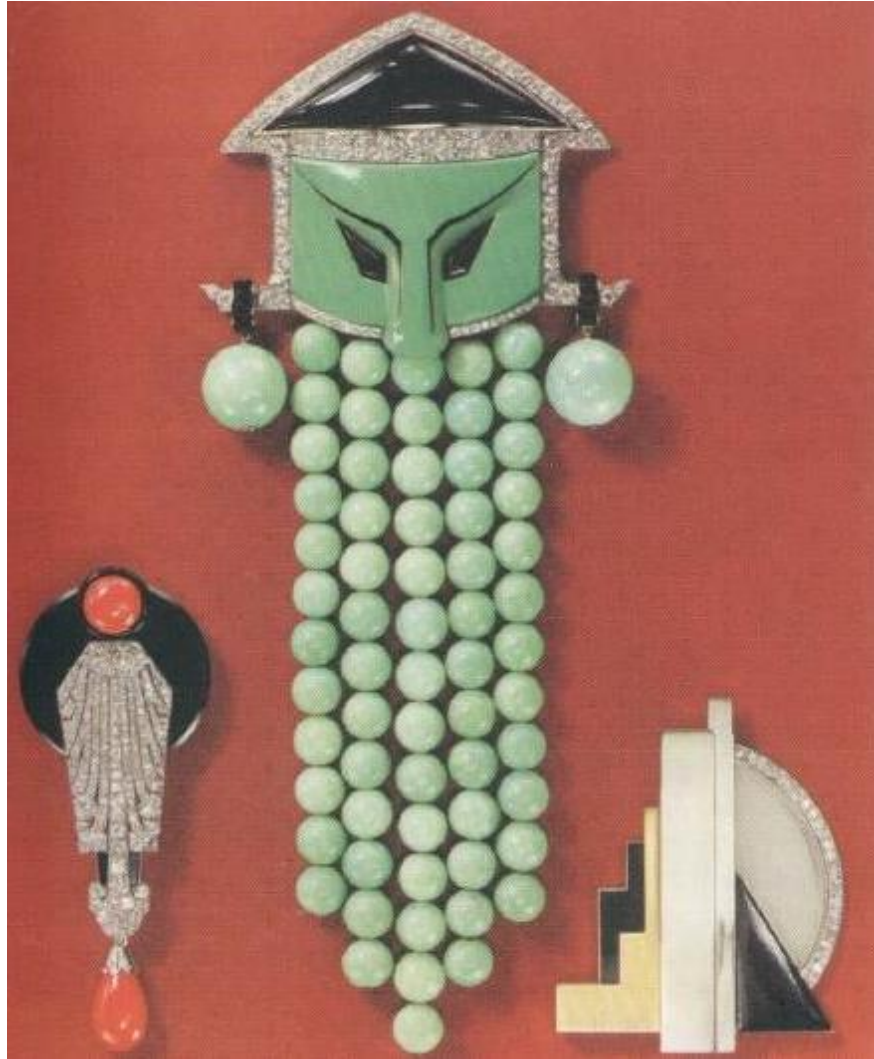


Figure 2.11

Georges Fouquet and Jean Fouquet, *Brooches*, platinum, onyx, coral, jade, rock, and lacquer, 1920s.



Figure 2.12
Lin Fengmian, *Symphonie Orientale*, 1920s.



Figure 2.13

Gao Qifeng, *Monkeys and Snowy Pine*, hanging scroll, ink and color on paper, 177 x 91.5cm, Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1916.



Figure 2.14

Lin Fengmian, *Méditation des Grands Ducs*, 1920s.

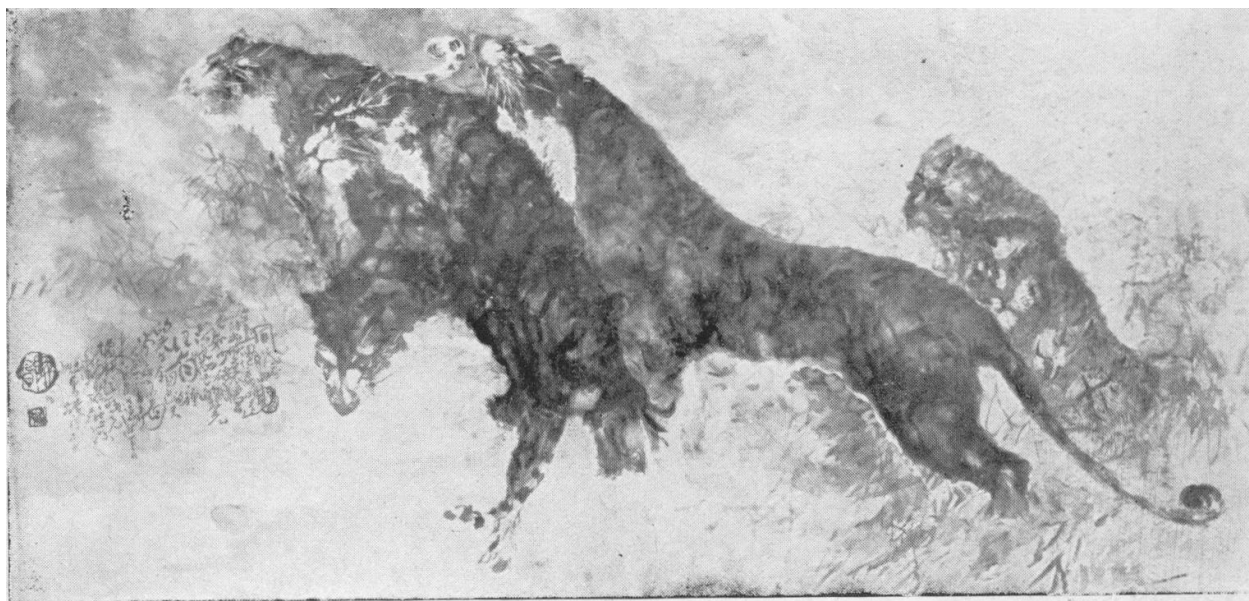


Figure 2.15

Lin Fengmian, *Vouloir Vivre*, 1920s.



Figure 2.16

Lin Fengmian, *Oiseaux Déplorant Leur Triste Destinée*, 1920s.

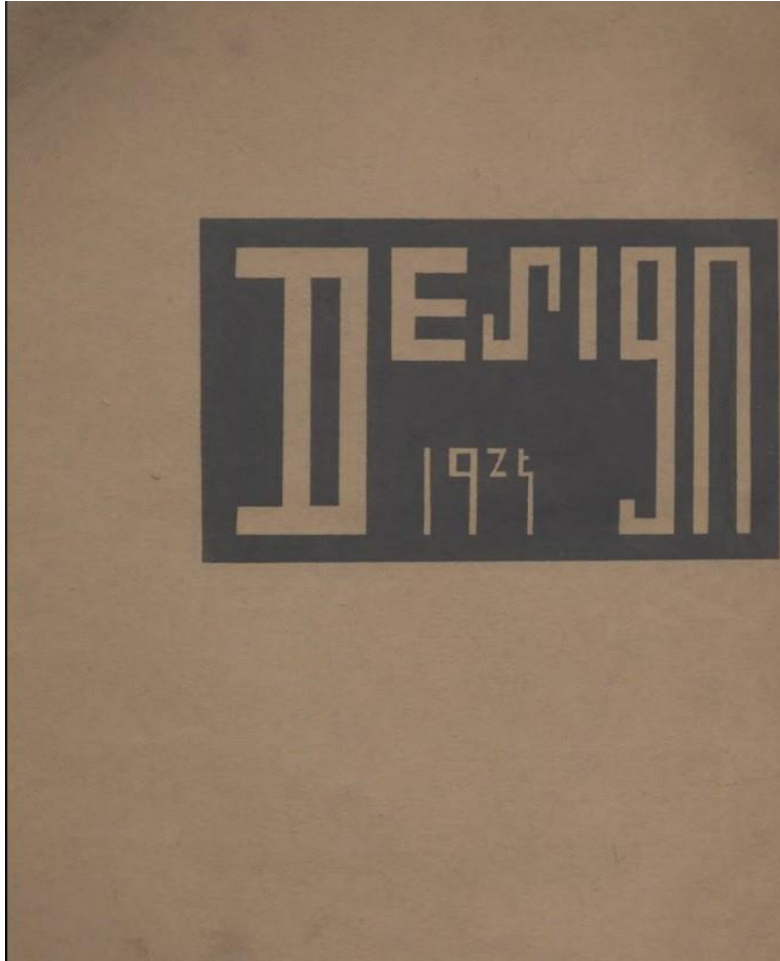


Figure 2.17

Design 1925, design motif collection published by Beijing First Public Secondary Girl School, 1925.

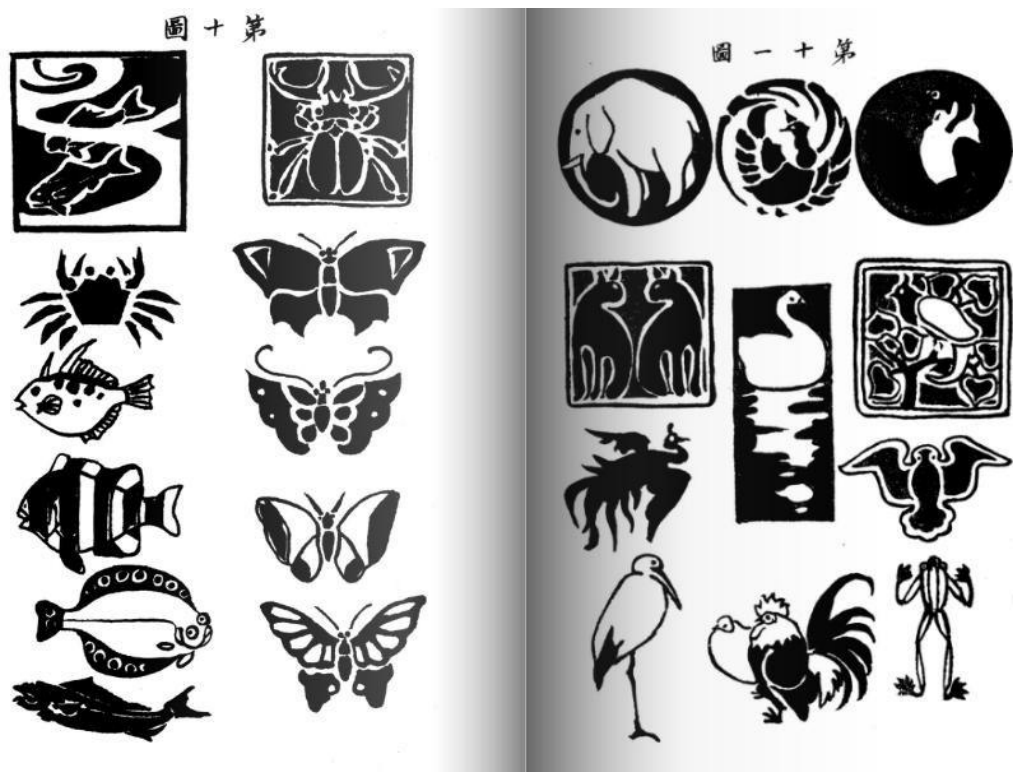


Figure 2.18

Wang Yanan, *Page from New Painting and Drawing Primer for Secondary Normal School—Design*, 1918.



Figure 2.19

Zhang Guangyu, *Design and Beauty in Shanghai chenguang*, 1921.



Figure 2.20

Zhang Guangyu, *Design and Beauty in Shibao Pictorial Weekly*, 1921.



Figure 2.21

Zhang Guangyu, *Design and Beauty in Shibao Pictorial Weekly*, 1921.

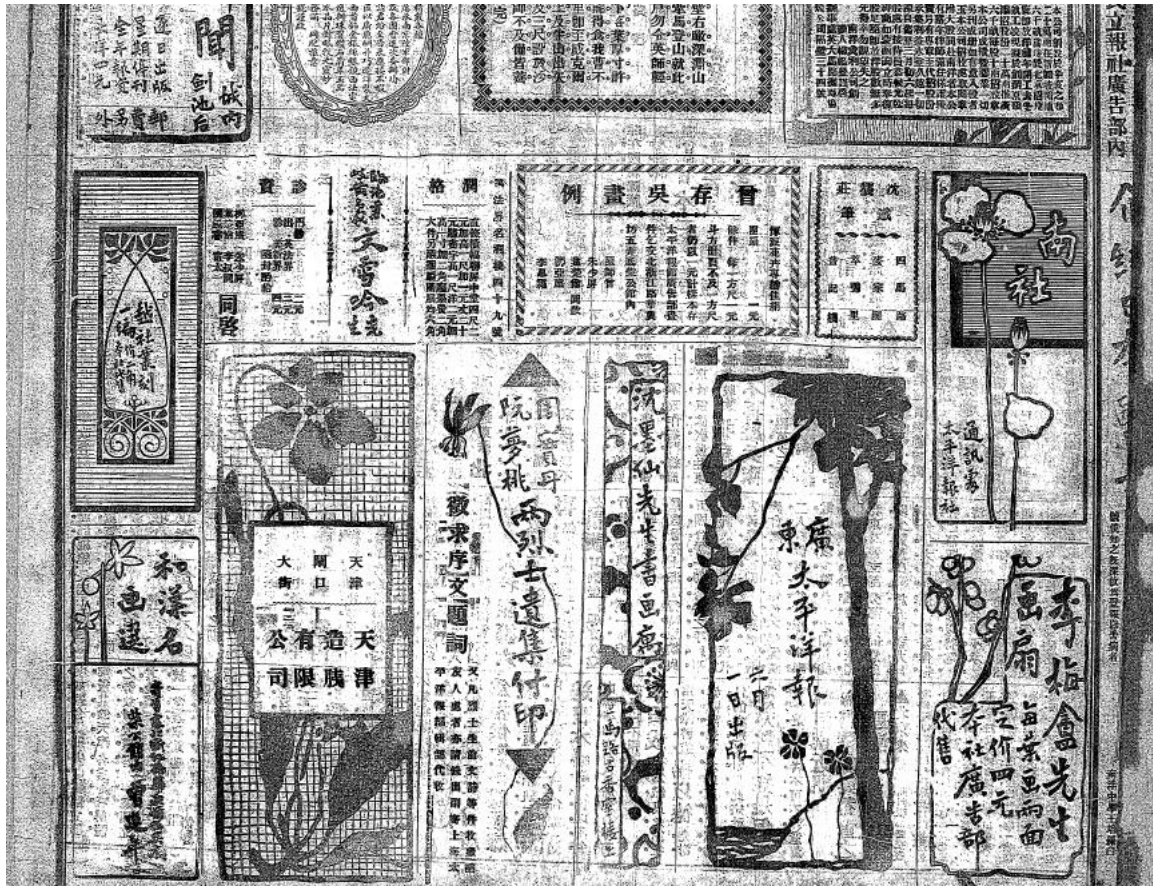


Figure 2.22

Li Shutong, *Layout design of the Pacific Times*, 1911.



Figure 2.23

Li Shutong, *Cover design of Baiyang (White Sun)*, 1913.

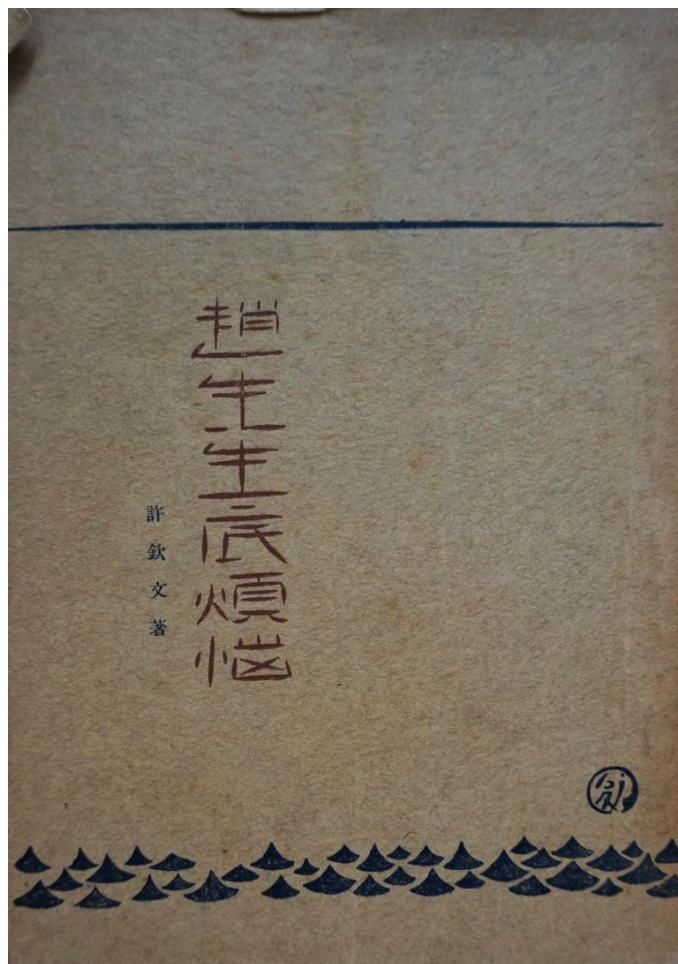


Figure 2.24

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Zhao xiansheng de fannao (Mr. Zhao's Troubles) by Xu Qinwen, published by Beixin Book Company, 1928.*

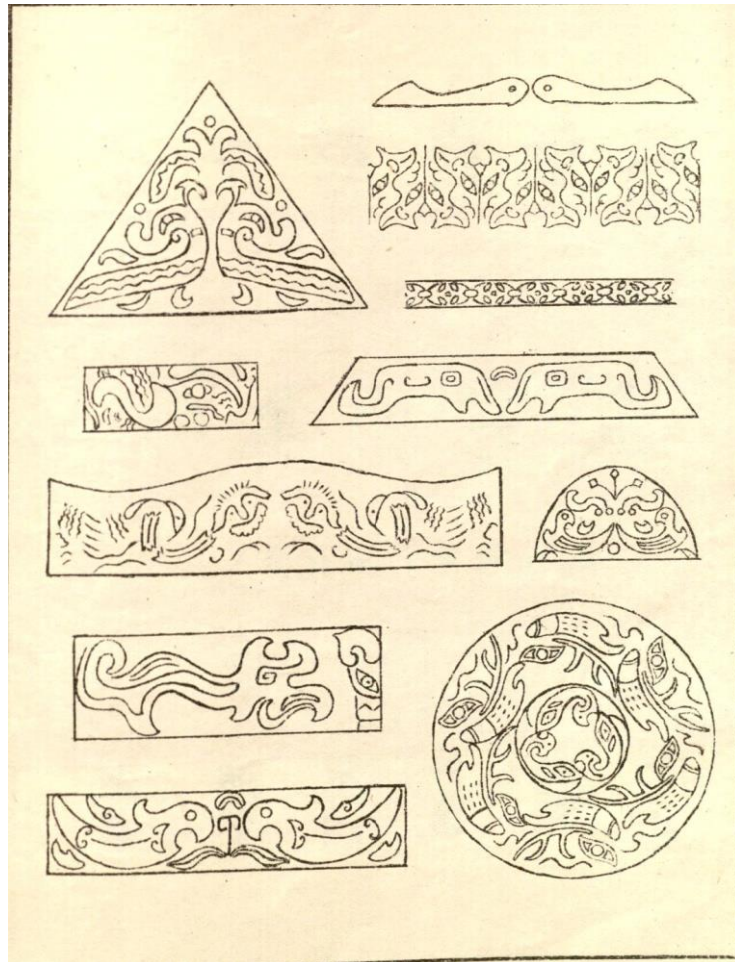


Figure 2.25

Tao Yuanqing, *Page from Chinese Ancient Designs*, edited by Ge Gongzhen, published by Shanghai Youzheng Book Company, 1925.



Figure 2.26

Tao Yuanqing, *Examples of patterns created by a single motif in Chinese Ancient Designs*, 1925.

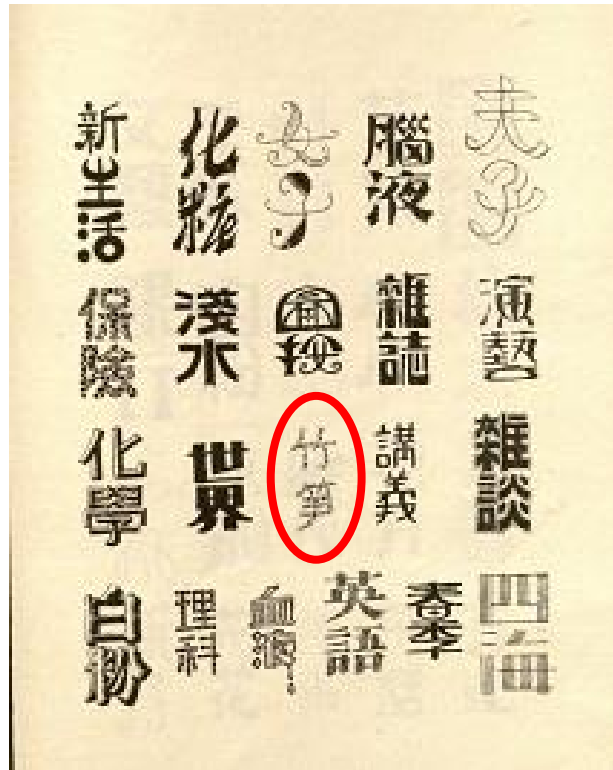


Figure 2.27

Page of art scripts in Chinese Ancient Designs, 1925.

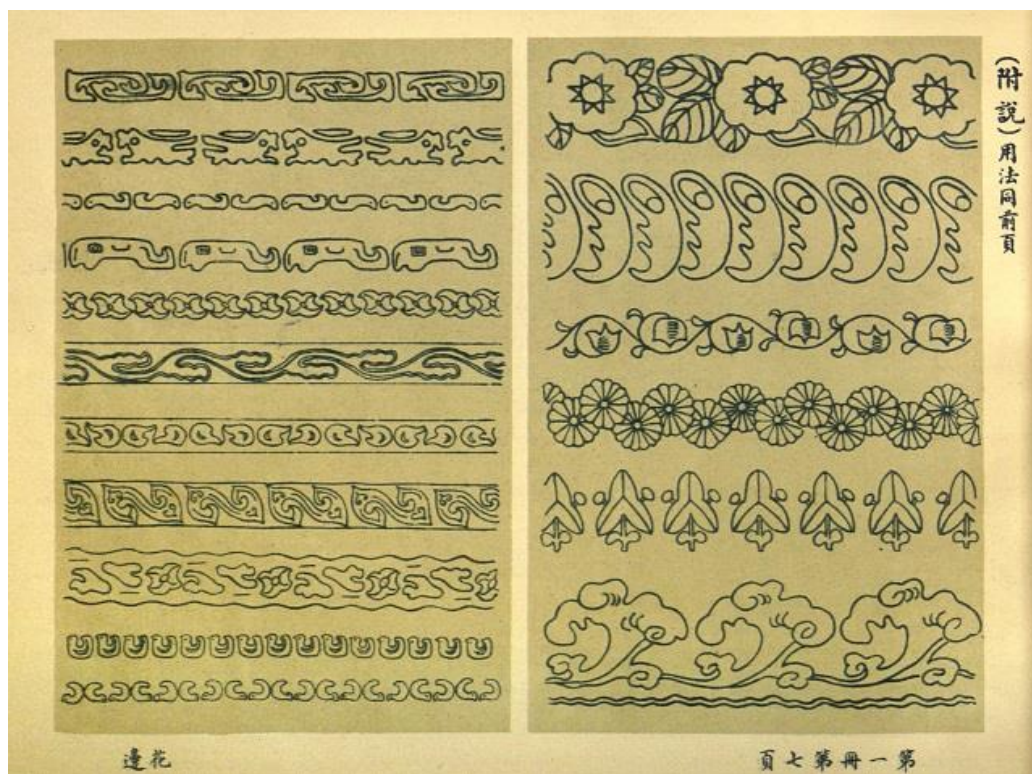


Figure 2.28

He Mingzhai and Du Shanru, *Page in Embroidery Design Motif*, published by Shanghai Commercial Press, 1929.

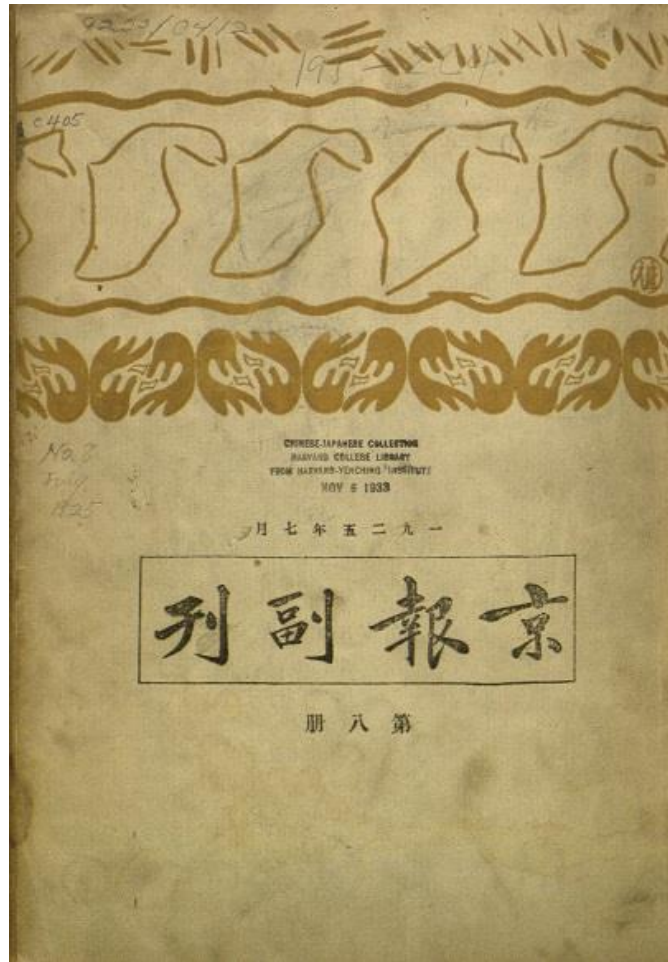


Figure 2.29

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Jingbao fukan (Literary Supplement to Beijing News)*, 1925.

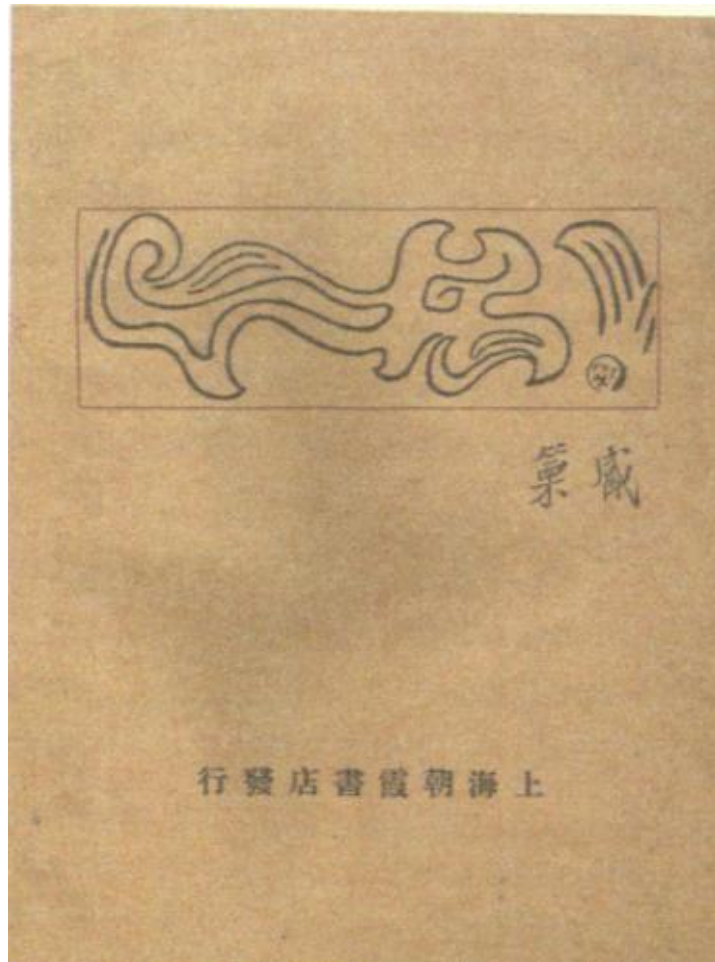


Figure 2.30

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Bili*, published by Shanghai Zhaoxia Bookstore, 1928.

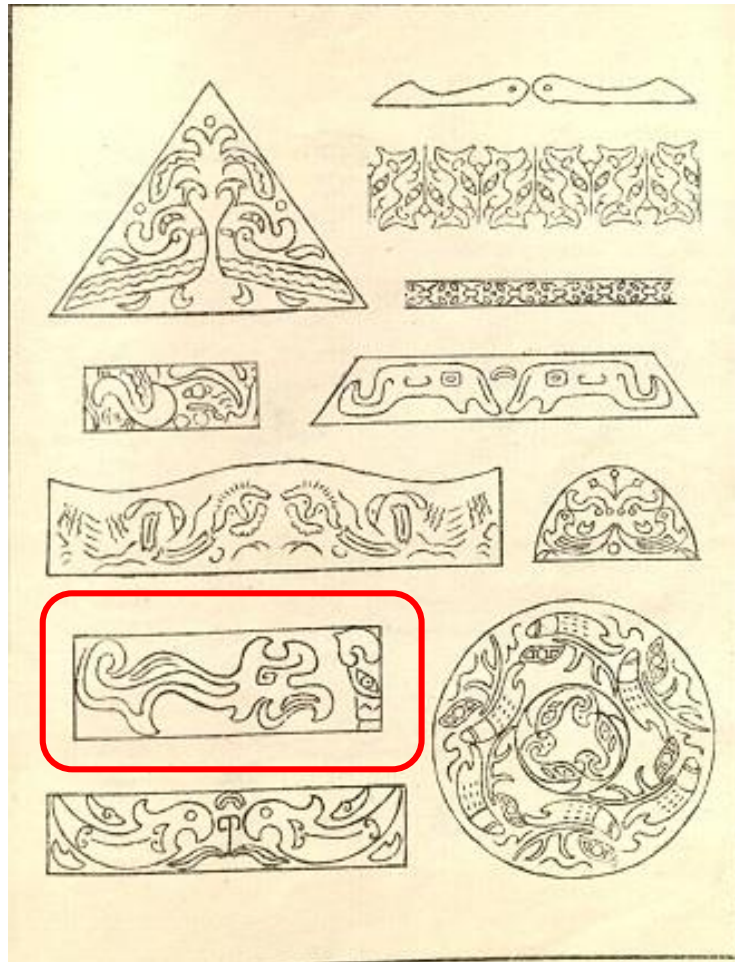


Figure 2.31

Tao Yuanqing, *Page from Chinese Ancient Designs*, 1925.



Figure 2.32

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Maoxian wa (Wool Socks) by Xu Qinwen*, published by Beixin Book Company, 1926.

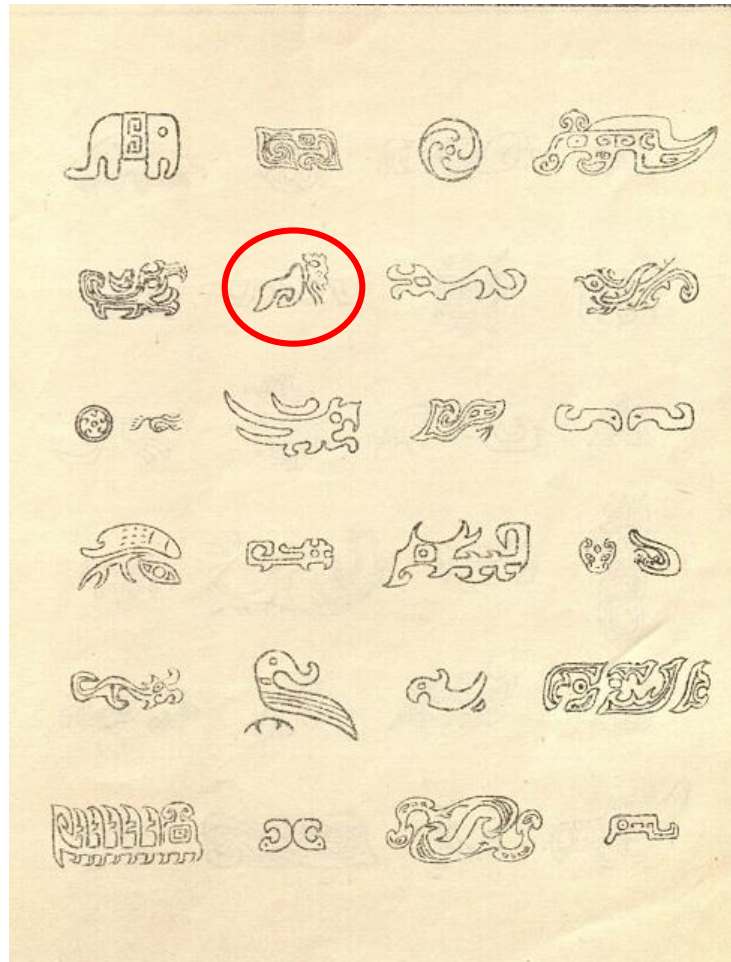


Figure 2.33

Tao Yuanqing, *Page from Chinese Ancient Designs*, 1925.



Figure 2.34

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Huijia (Going Home) by Xu Qinwen*, published by Beixin Book Company, 1926.

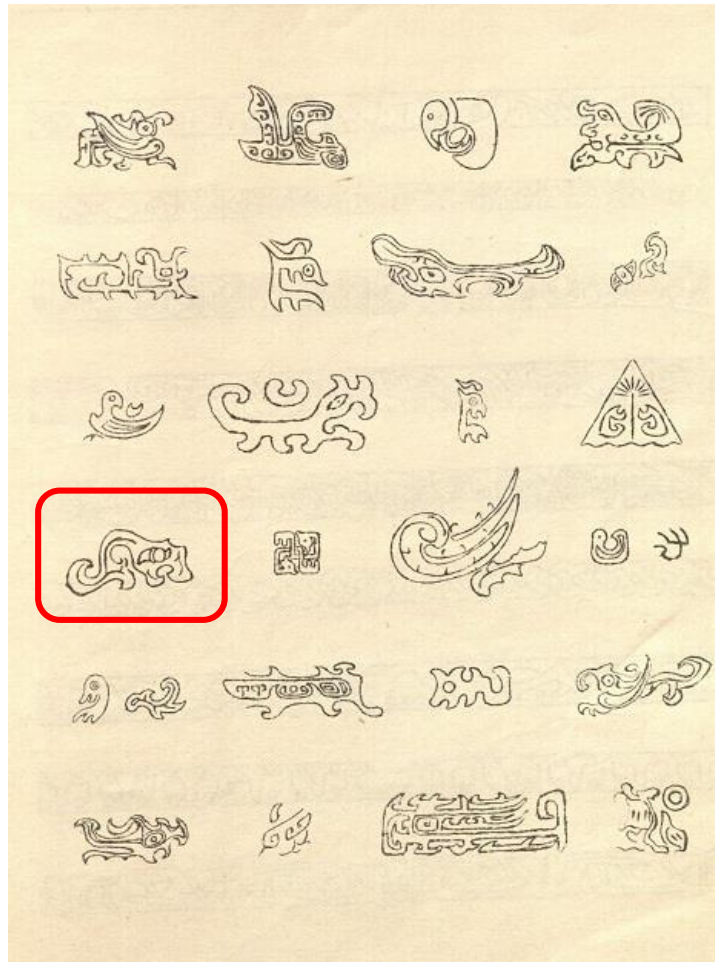


Figure 2.35

Tao Yuanqing, *Page from Chinese Ancient Designs*, 1925.



Figure 2.36

Ren Yi, *Scholar on a Rock*, folding fan mounted as an album leaf, ink and color on paper, 19.1 x 53.8cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, ca.1880.

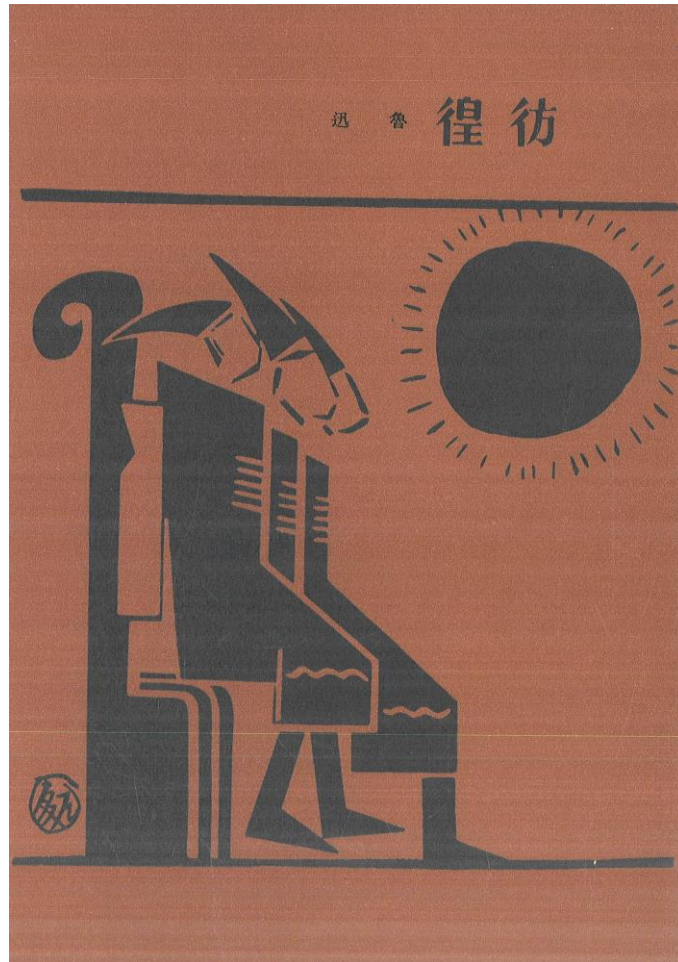


Figure 3.1

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Panghuang (Wandering) by Lu Xun*, published by Beixin Book Company, 1926.

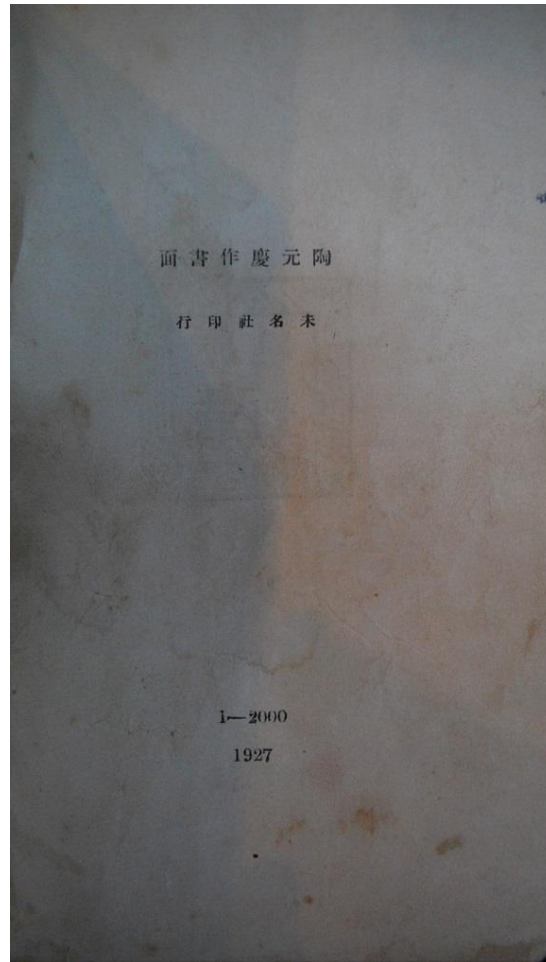


Figure 3.2

Front matter in Symbols of Depression, 1927 print.



Figure 3.3

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Bailu Monthly*, 1926.



Figure 3.4

Fei Danxu, *The Flute Player*, ink and color on paper, 105 x 48.5cm, Shanghai Museum, 1850.



Figure 3.5

Zhang Guangyu, *Design and Beauty in Shibao Pictorial Weekly*, no.54, June 26, 1921.

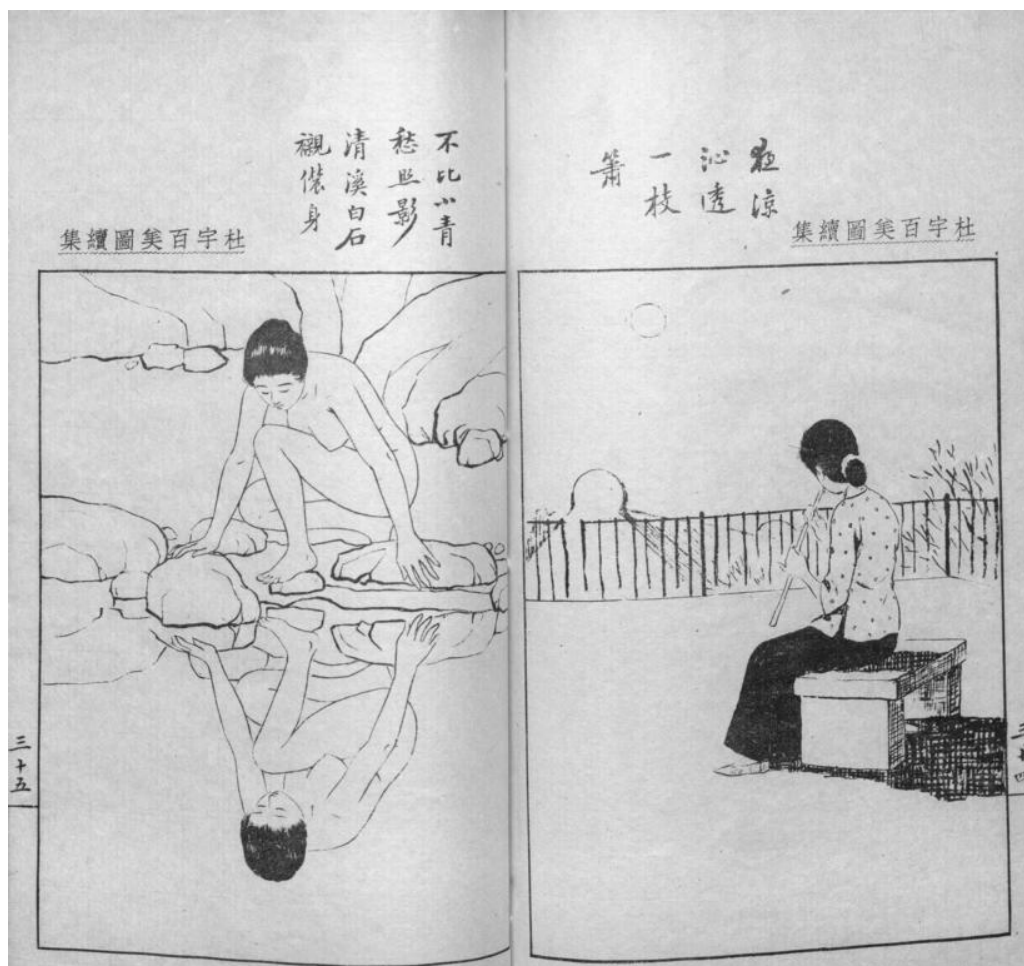


Figure 3.6

Dan Duyu, *Page from Shizhuang Duyu baimeitu zheng ji (Duyu's Fashionable One Hundred Beauties)*, published by Shanghai xinmin tushuguan xiongdi gongsi, 1923.



Figure 3.7

Xu Beihong, *Sound of the Flute*, oil on canvas, 79 x 38cm, Xu Beihong Memorial Museum Beijing, 1926.



Figure 3.8

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Gong Xian*, no. 9, published by Shanghai Yingying Book House, February 25, 1928.



Figure 3.9

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design for Wu qi zhi lei* by Xu Qintwen, published by Yuzhou feng Society, 1937.



Figure 3.10

Feng Zikai, *Zhanzhan's Bike*, *Portrait of the Children*, 1927.



Figure 3.11

Feng Zikai, *Experiment No.1, Portrait of Children*, 1932.



Figure 3.12

Feng Zikai, *As Big As Each Other*, Portrait of Children, 1932.

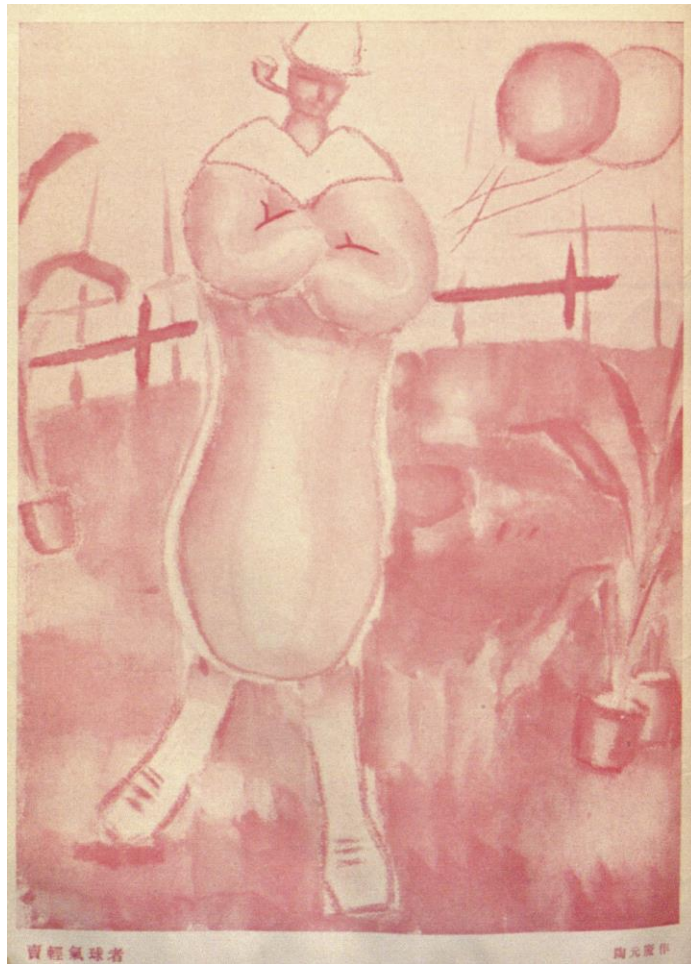


Figure 3.13

Tao Yuanqing, *The Balloon Seller*, watercolor, reproduced in the *Short Story Monthly*, 19:2, 1928.



Figure 3.14

Tao Yuanqing, *Outside of the Car Window*, reproduced in *Catalogue of Tao Yuanqing's Exhibited Works*, 1928.

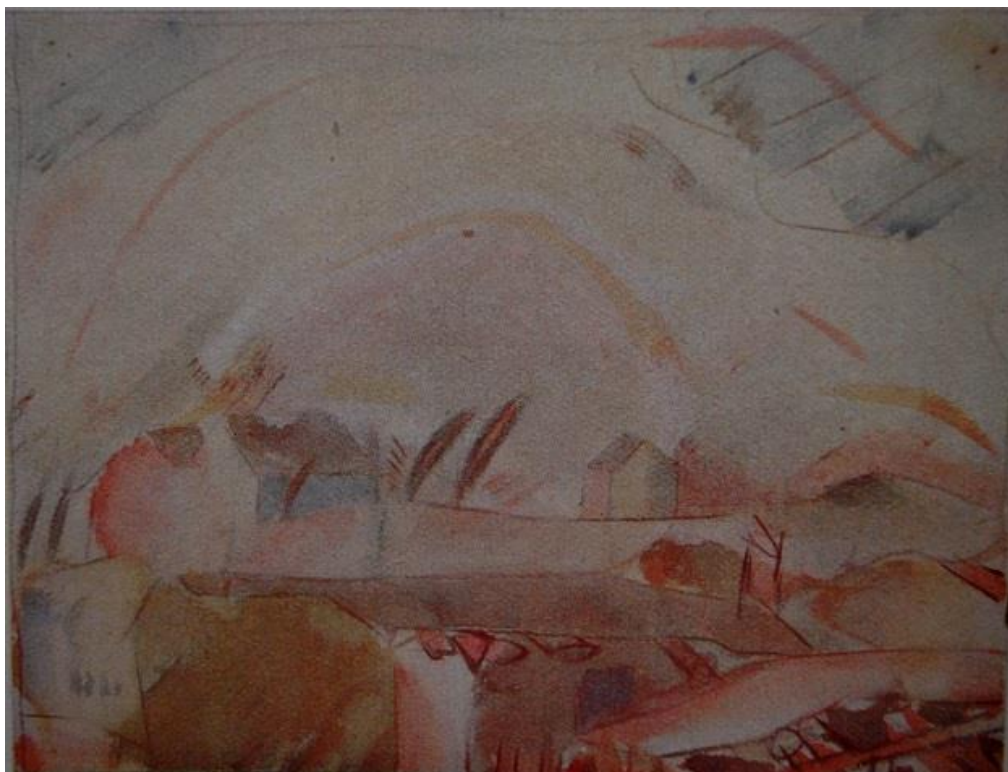


Figure 3.15

Tao Yuanqing, *A Glimpse*, reproduced in *Catalogue of Tao Yuanqing's Exhibited Works*, 1928.



Figure 3.16

Tao Yuanqing, *Fallen Flowers*, reproduced in *Short Story Monthly*, 19:1, 1928.



Figure 3.17

Jiang Xiaojian, *Flower vase*, reproduced in *Short Story Monthly*, 19:4, 1928.



Figure 3.18

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Ruo you qi shi (Much Ado About Nothing) by Xu Qinwen*, published by Beixin Book Company, 1928.

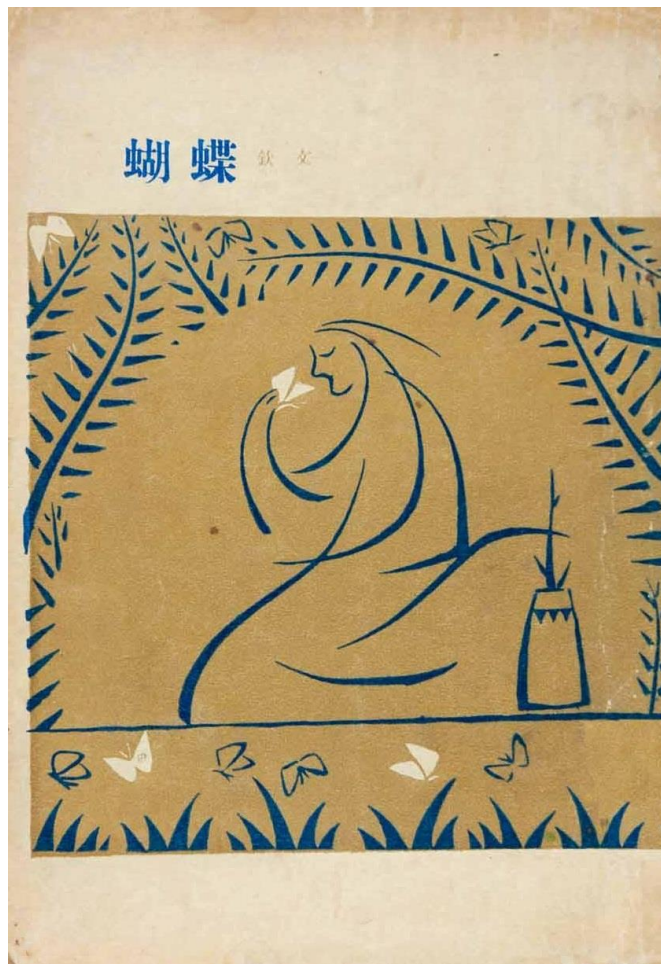


Figure 3.19

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Hudie (Butterfly) by Xu Qinwen*, published by Beixin Book Company, 1928.

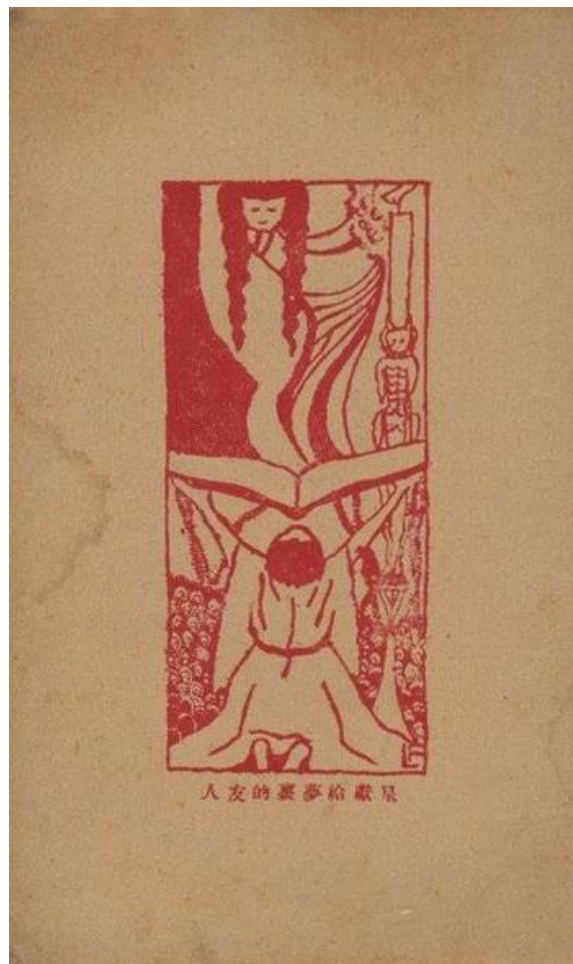


Figure 4.1

Ye Lingfeng, *Illustration in Meng li de weixiao (Smiles in the Dreams)* by Zhou Quanping, published by Zhonghua shuju, 1925.



Figure 4.2

Shen Bochen, *Illustration of the Opera Fenghewan*, 1911-13.

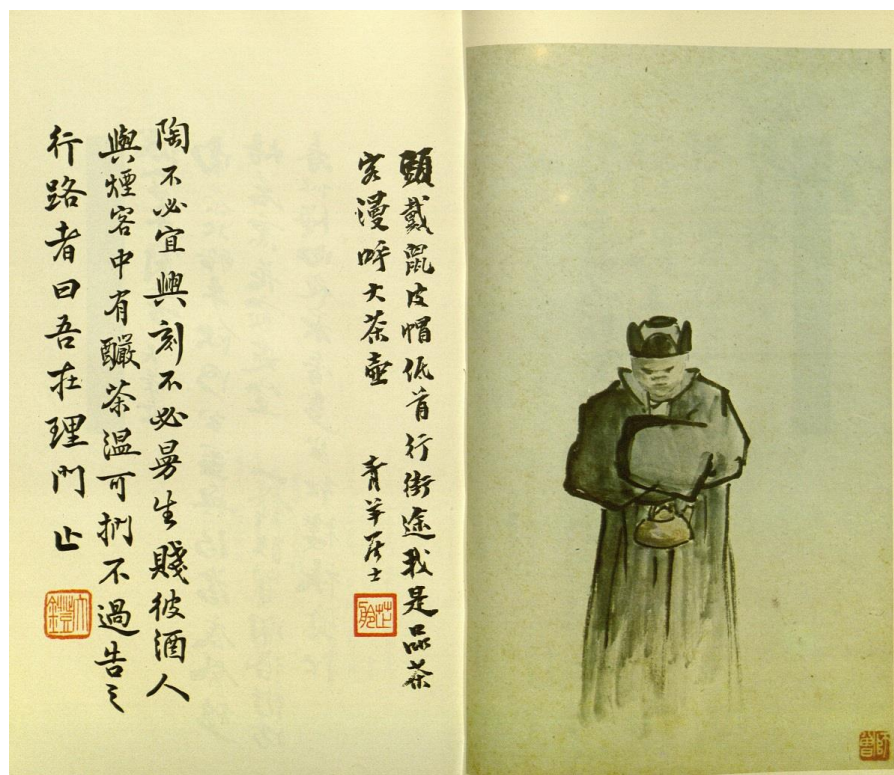


Figure 4.3

Chen Shizeng, *The Tea Drink*, ink and color on paper, 1914-15.



Figure 4.4

Tao Yuanqing, *Cover design of Biti A'er (Snot-nosed Ah Er) by Xu Qinwen*, published by Beixin Book Company, 1927.



Figure 4.5

Gai Qi, *Baochai Catching Butterflies*, illustration from *Honglou meng tu yong*, woodblock print, early 19th century.



Figure 4.6

Fei Yigeng, *Catching the Butterflies*, ink and color on silk, 91 x 38.9cm, Zhejiang Provincial Museum, 19th century.



Figure 4.7

Tao Yuanqing, *Remnant of the Yingtian Pagoda*, watercolor or oil, reproduced in *Eastern Miscellany* 26:18, 1929, painted in 1923.



Figure 4.8

Gao Jianfu, *Wucenglou*, ink and color on paper, 80 x 42cm, Hong Kong Museum of Art, 1926.



Figure 4.9

Xugu, *Album of Landscape and Figures*, ink and color on paper, 38.3 x 52.5cm, Shanghai Museum, 1876.

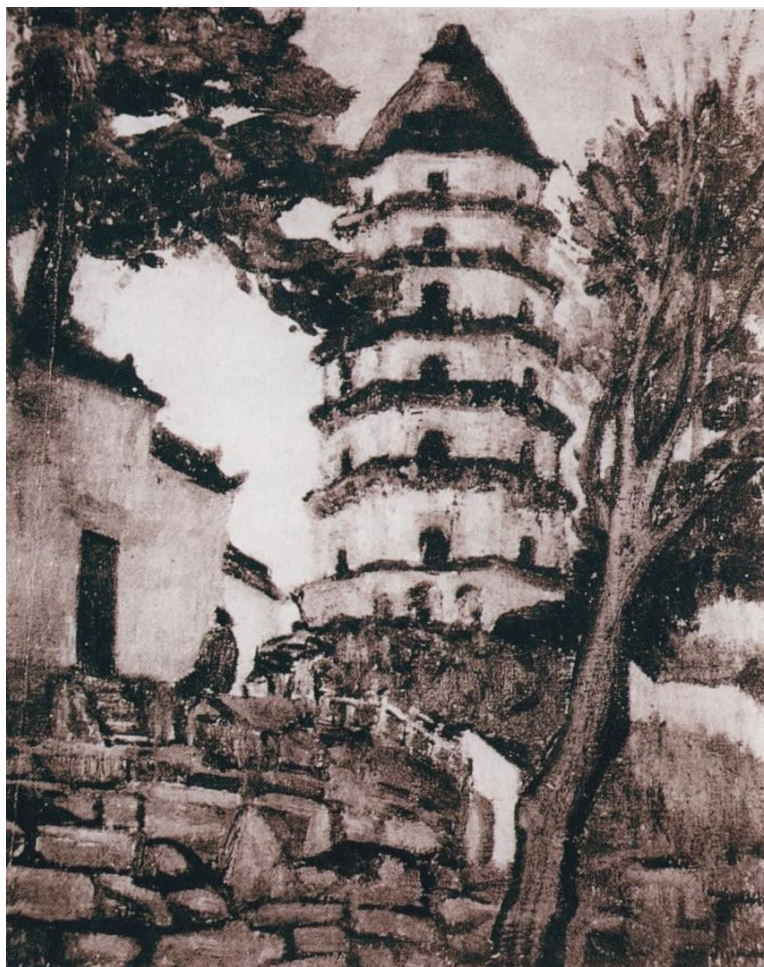


Figure 4.10

Pan Yuliang, *Tiger Hill Pagoda*, oil on canvas, 1932.



Figure 4.11

Photograph of Shaoxing Yingtian Pagoda in Jinghu huhang yong tielu daily, 1219:12, 1925.



Figure 4.12

Jiang Xiaojian, *Cover design of Zipou (Self-dissection) by Xu Zhimo*, published by Shanghai Xinyue Book Store, 1928.